ON THE IMPORTANCE OF *RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.*

FROM THE FRENCH

OF

Mons. NECKER.

A NEW TRANSLATION,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

Priſtinis orbati muneribus, hæc ſtudia renovare cœpimus, ut et animus moleſtiis hac potiſſimum relevaretur, et prodeſſemus civibus noſtris qua re cumque poſſemus. CICERO.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR W. GORDON AND J. DICKSON,

M,DCC,LXXXIX.

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FROM THE PULPIT

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PREFACE by the Editors,

WITH A

SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

NO piece of literary labour is generally eſteemed eaſier, or more readily undertaken than tranſlation. As it requires not the mind to be exerted in the diſcovery or arrangement of new truths, in deductions of reaſoning, or flights of fancy; and all that the tranſlator has to do, is to expreſs the reaſonings and ſentiments of another, in a language different from that in which they were originally written; it is therefore thought a taſk, to the performance of which, rather patient induſtry than genius or knowledge is requiſite.

Theſe ideas concerning the merits of tranſlation, have contributed to render tranſlations more numerous, and the labour, at the ſame time, more contemptible. Humble as the taſk is, yet, while there are ſo many readers among us, and the majority of theſe are more eager in the ſearch of novelty than of truth,—attempts will be naturally made to gratify their curioſity, not merely by original compoſitions in their native tongue, but by rendering the ſtores of ancient and foreign languages eaſily acceſſible to them. And, as vanity or neceſſity have always tempted many more to write, than were well qualified to inſtruct or to pleaſe,—thoſe who feel themſelves thus impelled to become authors, without having any intellectual treaſures of their own to diſtribute, are willing to avail themſelves of the trifling advantages which may be gain-

ed by labouring humbly on the thoughts and words of others. But, whatever he himſelf may fancy, or whatever may be the general opinion of the world,—the man who has few thoughts of his own, will ſeldom be able to diſtinguiſh himſelf by peculiar excellence in expreſſing the thoughts of others: There ſubſiſts a certain connection between language and ideas, ſo intimate, that no mind can ever be eminently maſter of the one, which is barren of the other. Beſides, he whoſe abilities are not ſuch as to enable him to tranſlate well, can ſcarcely be expected to make a judicious choice of books to be tranſlated. His objects being either the acquiſition of that very inferior degree of fame, which conſiſts in being known as the tranſlator of a book, or the pitiful ſum which may be obtained for the copy of a tranſlation,—he naturally enquires, not what book is beſt ſuited to his own turn of mind and degree of knowledge, nor what book is moſt highly diſtinguiſhed for ſcience or elegance or virtuous ſentiments, unknown or but little known in his native language,—but what book is moſt likely to attract the curioſity of the great maſs of readers: Careleſs whether its tendency be to foment the paſſions, and pervert the underſtanding, or to rectify the judgment and refine the feelings of the heart; whether it be the production of learning and genius, exerted under the direction of ſound taſte, or the effuſion of empty conceit. Hence thoſe myriads of Novels, Hiſtories, Voyages, and Travels that are every year preſented to the Engliſh reader, in a ſort of Babyloniſh dialect, which is not language, but a jarring mixture of the moſt anomalous idioms of different languages, and ſaid to be tranſlations from the French or the German.

It is much to be wiſhed, that both original writers and tranſlators would conſider ſeriouſly, in what inſtances their labours can be beneficial to the world; and that

readers would reflect, from what ſpecies of reading they are moſt likely to reap advantage. The object of the ſtudent's enquiries ought undoubtedly to be, ſuch an acquaintance with the appearances of nature, and the productions and operations of art, as may enable him, in any ſituation, to chuſe the beſt ends, and to purſue theſe by the moſt ſuitable means. For this purpoſe, he is to obſerve, with peculiar diligence, the phænomena of the human mind and the appearances which ſociety exhibits, to ſtudy the laws of matter and motion, to examine the œconomy of the inferior animals and of the vegetable kingdom, to count the number and trace the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. And, as the limited ſphere of every individual's obſervation forbids him to hope, ſolely from his own induſtry, however indefatigable, a ſufficient acquaintance with all theſe objects; hence it becomes neceſſary for him whoſe enquiries are directed to ſuch an end, to dedicate much of his time to books; which may make known to him the remarks of others, may call his attention to objects which, though of high importance, might otherwiſe eſcape even from under his eye unnoticed, and may rouſe in his mind, an emulation and an energy which he would not otherwiſe feel. Books may be likewiſe conſidered by the ſtudent in a different point of view. Beſides exciting in his breaſt a generous emulation, and leading him, at times, by a ſhorter and eaſier way, to the knowledge of nature; they afford, themſelves, a new field for obſervation. They are not only, as it were, cabinets of natural curioſities, in which ſpecimens collected from different parts of nature are elegantly and methodically arranged, but exhibit alſo a rude and careleſs aſſemblage of objects, which may attract the notice of the curious obſerver, in the ſame way as a newly diſcovered iſland, abounding in peculiar

animals and plants and foſſils, would draw the attention of the Naturaliſt. Such being the purpoſes of ſtudy, and ſuch the uſes of books, we may naturally infer that books not formed to contribute in an eminent degree to theſe ends, can ſcarcely merit the ſtudent's attention. A writer will, no doubt, be diſpoſed to regard himſelf as a man of no ſmall conſequence, even though he communicate but little uſeful information in a direct way, if he can only ſucceed in affording general entertainment. But no writer will attempt this ſucceſsfully, whoſe book does not contain ſome faithful delineations of the appearances of external nature or of human life, or ſome happy new combinations of thoſe incidents and images which the common appearances of nature and life, and the ordinary courſe of things, afford. The reader, the writer, the tranſlator, therefore, loſe, or at leaſt deſerve to loſe, their labour, when they keep not theſe great objects in view.

The book, to a new Tranſlation of which we prefix theſe obſervations, is the work of a celebrated man, on an important ſubject. Although the doctrines, precepts, and promiſes of Religion ſeldom influence the ſentiments and conduct of mankind, ſo powerfully as might be wiſhed; yet they contribute ſo much to ſupport the order of ſociety,—that ſmall portion of diſintereſted virtue which appears in the world, is ſo abſolutely dependent on them,—and they are ſo invariably the reſource to which, even thoſe who at happier times regard them with indifference, flee for conſolation and ſupport under ſickneſs and ſorrow; that perhaps no ſubject of higher importance, or more generally intereſting, can be, at any time, offered to the attention of the human mind. And, ſince the influence of religious principles is ſo beneficial; whatever can contribute to render it more powerful, will be ſurely conſidered as worthy, at leaſt, of ſome notice.

The preſent Work appears happily calculated to remove many of the prejudices which the moſt reſpectable of the enemies of Religion, thoſe who though unfriendly to Religion, are yet not hoſtile to moral virtue and ſocial order, entertain againſt it. It offers no apology for fanaticiſm or ſuperſtition. Its deſign is not to defend the peculiarities of any particular ſyſtem of Religion, or to dreſs out the whims of any ſect in an alluring garb. Our Author's reaſonings are not directed againſt the Pagan, the Mahometan, the Jew, or the Deiſt; neither does he labour to perſuade the Papiſt to turn Proteſtant, or the Proteſtant to turn Quaker. He labours chiefly to combat an opinion, which, however unjuſt, has never been ſo prevalent as among the geniuſes of this enlightened age,—That Religion contributes little or nothing to the ſupport of ſocial order or civil government; and another, naturally reſulting from this,—That it were better, if religious eſtabliſhments were entirely aboliſhed, and the ſupport of morality truſted ſolely to civil laws and the moral feelings of the human heart. In contradiction to theſe opinions, M. NECKER aſſerts, that the principles of Religion and thoſe of Morality are connected in the moſt intimate manner; and, that an eſtabliſhed Religion is ſcarce leſs neceſſary than a code of civil laws, to the exiſtence of a well regulated ſtate. The inefficacy of civil laws for the prevention of crimes, the weakneſs of our virtuous feelings, when oppoſed by thoſe of a contrary tendency, and the diſcontent which the view of the unequal diſtribution of property in Society muſt naturally excite in the minds of thoſe to whom the ſmalleſt ſhare has fallen,—are ſo many facts, which he urges to prove, that ſomething more beſides civil laws, and moral precepts, and the virtuous feelings of the human heart, is neceſſary to maintain the

order of Society. With candour, yet with vehement eloquence, he ſhews how happily the fundamental principles of Religion are calculated to repreſs crimes, to ſupport integrity and juſtice, to cheriſh benevolence; and thus to render men friends and brothers, who would otherwiſe regard each other with the ferocity of *ravening wolves*.

But when diſpoſed to embrace Religion, on the idea of its being eſſentially neceſſary to the ſupport of civil government, we will naturally prefer that ſyſtem of Religion which contributes moſt eminently to this end. Chriſtianity exerts a happy influence on the welfare of ſociety, and is eſtabliſhed through the greateſt part of the civilized world. Our Author, therefore, through the whole of his Treatiſe, refers to Chriſtianity as the Religion, the eſtabliſhment of which muſt render mankind more virtuous and happy than moral precepts and civil laws can poſſibly do without ſuch aid. Not content with recommending Religion, by proving its utility, he alſo examines with great induſtry and penetration, into the truth of a few of the leading doctrines of Natural and Revealed Religion, and eſtabliſhes them by a variety of powerful arguments. He is not however, one of thoſe cold reaſoners who addreſs only the underſtanding; he oftener addreſſes the heart; and not ſeldom, the reader will probably find, in that language which is beſt calculated to affect it.

The general tendency of the Work, the elegance and ſpirit by which it is every where characteriſed, with the diſtinguiſhed name of the Author, have induced us to think, that it might attract readers, and be read with advantage: And, as we cannot think the Engliſh dreſs in which it lately appeared, a very graceful one, we therefore venture to offer a new tranſlation of it to the Public.

The former Tranſlation has no doubt its merit; but the Tranſlator, from hurry, or ſome other cauſe, has often deviated entirely from the ſenſe of the Author. Witneſs the following inſtance, ſelected from many others, (*Lond. Tranſ.* p. 329.) "We ſhould be very differently "affected, if, for the firſt time, we contemplated the meaneſt part of this admirable whole! but even then, in a "little time, the ſtrong conviction of the exiſtence of a "God would be *worn away, and become what it is at "preſent.*" This ſentence, if it can be ſaid to have a meaning at all, ſurely bears one directly contrary to that of the Author. The intelligent reader will, at once, perceive, by glancing at the Author's own words*, that he here earneſtly wiſhes to inculcate this important truth, That a view of the wonders of nature is ſufficient to convince, even the moſt inconſiderate perſons, of the exiſtence of a God.

With regard to the preſent Tranſlation, we will only preſume to ſay, that though it may often fall ſhort of the ſpirit and elegance of the original, yet it does, in no inſtance, ſo far as we know, depart from the ſenſe of the Author. Such liberties, however, have been always taken with peculiar modes of expreſſion, as were thought neceſſary to avoid obſcurity of diction in our language.

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* —Ah! combien nous ſerions émus differement, ſi nous contemplions pour la première fois, l'une des plus foibles parties de ce merveilleux enſemble! Qu'en peu de temps alors l'opinion de l'exiſtence d'un Dieu paroîtroit vraiſemblable à ceux qui ſ'en éloignent aujourd'hui davantage! *See p.* 262. *of the preſent Tranſlation.*

To gratify the curioſity of the Reader, we ſhall conclude with the following

SHORT ACCOUNT of the AUTHOR.

MONS. NECKER is a Swiſs by birth: His anceſtors originally from Cuſtrin. He was educated at Geneva, where his father was a Profeſſor. In his youth, he frequently obtained the prize for literary performances at his college: He is ſaid to have diſcovered an early inclination to poetical purſuits. Among other pieces, he wrote three comedies, in which his friends have aſſerted, may be found the wit and ſpirit of MOLIERE.

Even ſince he engaged in a political life, he has found leiſure for poetical compoſitions. A ſatirical eulogium, entitled 'The happineſs of Fools,' in imitation of Eraſmus's 'Praiſe of Folly,' exhibits ſtrong marks of a mind capable of very oppoſite purſuits. He entered very young into the office of his uncle Monſ. VERNET *at Paris, and in a very ſhort time, was found ſufficiently qualified to take the direction of the houſe. When he was about twenty-five years of age, he became known to the Abbé* RAYNAL, *who ſoon diſcovered in him thoſe great powers of mind, which have been ſince ſo eminently diſplayed in the management of the finances of France. He ſaw the intereſts of Commerce with the eye of a politician and a philoſopher, of which his enquiries into the affairs of the Eaſt India Company may be adduced as a proof. Of his early writings, the moſt remarkable are his* Eloge *on Colbert, which obtained the prize at the Academy in* 1773; *his Treatiſe on the Corn Trade, of which four editions were printed in the ſpace of one month; his collection of Edicts with Notes, preſented to the King; his Treatiſe on the Adminiſtration of the Finances of France; and his* Compte rendu au Roi.

Theſe laborious works, though ſufficient to fill up the time of moſt men, have not ſo entirely occupied M. NECKER, *as to prevent him from mixing in the world, where his deportment has been marked with all the traits of politeneſs and good breeding, which were ſo much prized by the late Lord* CHESTERFIELD. *At the time of a great ſcarcity, Geneva, the place of his education, was indebted to him for many beneficial advices. In* 1776, *he came to London, where he very ſpeedily made himſelf maſter of the theory of the Engliſh Funds. At the end of that year, he was named Director of the Royal Treaſury in France, and in the year after, Director General of the Finances. Removed from this elevated ſituation, he preſerved in his retreat, the general eſteem of mankind: The nation which he had governed, adored him for his integrity, and the miniſter who ſucceeded him, frequently aſked his aſſiſtance. He conſtantly refuſed every gratification which his Sovereign was deſirous of making him. His houſe was built according to his rank and fortune; but amidſt his wealth, he has preſerved in his perſon the ſimplicity of a ſage.*

The annals of mankind have ſeldom ſhewn what is to be found in the accompliſhed Miniſter of France. A union of Politics and Philoſophy. A mind formed to bear proſperity without inſolence, and adverſity without diſcontent. He alone, of all the French Cabinet, after many reverſes of fortune, and amid the preſent convulſions of the State, has been able, by his exemplary patience and moderation, at once to conciliate the affection of the Sovereign and of the people. In ſhort, that ſpirit of benevolence and liberality which forms the prominent feature of his character as a Stateſman, may perhaps have contributed not a little to pave the way for a revolution in the French Government, which may tranſmit his name with luſtre to poſterity.

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INTRODUCTION.

WHEN, on my retiring from public life, my thoughts ceaſed to be occupied in conſulting the welfare and dignity of the ſtate as a political body, or in directing the operations of Government to the ſecurity and happineſs of its ſubjects, I found myſelf almoſt without any object of purſuit, which might render life ſufficiently intereſting. Reſtleſs and uneaſy in this vacuity, my ſoul, ſtill active, felt the want of employment. At firſt I formed the deſign of writing down my obſervations on men and manners: I imagined that long experience amidſt thoſe active ſcenes which diſcover the paſſions, had taught me to know them well: But elevating my views, I became

animated with an ambition of reconciling the moſt ſublime contemplations with thoſe ſtudies which I was conſtrained to relinquiſh. Purſuing this train of thought, I remarked with ſatisfaction, that there exiſts a natural connection amongſt the various truths which contribute to the happineſs of mankind. Our prejudices and our paſſions, often attempt to diſunite them; but to an attentive obſerver, they are all ſeen to ſpring from one common origin. By the effect of this affinity,—the comprehenſive views of adminiſtration,—the ſpirit of laws,—morality and religious ſentiments, are all intimately connected. By maintaining this beautiful alliance, a rampart is raiſed around thoſe great works which are deſtined for the proſperity of States and the tranquillity of Nations.

Whoever has taken an active part in the management of public buſineſs, and made it, for any length of time, the object of his attention;—whoever has compared the various relations of the great whole with the natural diſpoſitions of minds and characters,—in ſhort, whoever has obſerved the oppoſite intereſts, and perpetual competitions of mankind, muſt be convinced, how much the beſt regulated government needs the aid of that inviſible ſpring, which exerts its ſecret influence on the conſciences of men. Thus, whilſt I now attempt to communicate ſome reflections on the importance

importance of Religious Opinions, I am not led ſo far from my uſual habit of thinking, as might, at the firſt glance, be imagined. When treating of the Management of the Finances, I omitted no argument which might tend to demonſtrate, That there is a cloſe connection between the efficacy of Governments and the wiſdom of their adminiſtration; between the virtue of a Sovereign and the confidence of his people: I ſtill, methinks, follow the ſame train of ſentiments, whilſt, aſtoniſhed at the indifferency which too generally prevails, I endeavour to reunite the moral duties of mankind to thoſe principles which are their genuine and moſt natural ſupport.

After ſtudying the intereſts of a Great Nation, and ſurveying the whole extent of our political ſocieties, one may, perhaps, approach nearer thoſe ſublime ideas, which connect the general ſtructure of the human race with that Infinite and Almighty Being, the firſt grand cauſe of all, and the great Ruler of the Univerſe.

It is true, that in the buſtle of an active adminiſtration, ſuch contemplations cannot be indulged: But they are inſenſibly formed and prepared, even amidſt the tumult of buſineſs; and the tranquillity of retirement enables us to extend and complete them.

The calm which ſucceeds the hurry of active life, appears to be the period moſt favourable to reflection. If any remembrance, or retroſpective views of what is paſt, ſhould infuſe into your mind a degree of melancholy, you will be inſenſibly led back towards thoſe thoughts which ſo long occupied your attention. Thus, the mariner, when he has renounced the dangers of the ſea, ſometimes ſeats himſelf on the beach, and there obſerves, with tranquillity, the vaſt ocean, the regular ſucceſſion of the waves, the effect of the winds, the flux and reflux of the tide, and the ſpacious firmament, where, during the night, amongſt lights innumerable, he diſtinguiſhes the lucid point which guides the navigator in his courſe.

Thoſe who fill the high ſtations under Government, in vain ſtrive with aſſiduity, to promote the general happineſs of mankind. Though deeply ſenſible of the important duties of office, in vain does a public character undertake the cauſe of the people, and labour inceſſantly to defend the weak againſt the attacks of the powerful. In this attempt he ſoon perceives his own defect of ability, and the narrow limits of ſovereign authority itſelf. Pity for the unfortunate is checked by the laws of civil right; generoſity and benevolence, by juſtice; and liberty, by its own abuſes. We obſerve a conſtant ſtruggle between

tween merit and intereſt;—honour and fortune;—patriotiſm and ſelfiſhneſs. Thoſe intervals in which the paſſions are truly unbiaſſed are but momentary; and unleſs ſome weighty circumſtances, or a vigorous and ſalutary exertion of adminiſtration, forcibly recal a ſenſe of the public good, a general languor pervades every mind, and ſociety ſinks into a confuſed maſs of blended and oppoſite intereſts; in which ſupreme authority only endeavours to maintain peace, without concern for any actual harmony, and without deſire to promote any favourable change, in the manners or happineſs of the people.

Amidſt theſe jarrings and contradictions, which are always recurring, a miniſter diſpoſed to reflection, is perpetually reminded of the imperfect ſtate of things. He feels regret, no doubt, while he contemplates the great diſproportion between his duties and his abilities; and ſometimes he is diſcouraged, on diſcovering the obſtacles and difficulties which he muſt ſurmount. He rears, with much labour, ſome bulwarks on the bank, the waters riſe, the torrent ſwells; his firſt precautions becoming inſufficient, he muſt renew his works; and theſe being again thrown down, he is thus engaged in a continual ſucceſſion of fruitleſs toil and unavailing attempts. What then might be the conſequence were the ſalutary tie of religious ſentiments to be broken? How dread-

ful would be the event were the operation of that powerful ſpring ever entirely deſtroyed? Soon ſhould we ſee the whole ſocial ſtructure ſhaken from its foundation, and the hand of Government no longer able to ſuſtain the huge and tottering edifice.

The Sovereign, and the Laws which are the interpreters of his wiſdom, ſhould have two great objects in view,—to maintain public order;—and to promote the happineſs of individuals. But to accompliſh this double purpoſe, the aſſiſtance of Religion is indiſpenſably neceſſary. It is only by extending his cares to the general welfare of the community, that a Sovereign can promote the happineſs of mankind; becauſe ſuch feelings as ariſe from the characters or peculiar ſituations of particular perſons, are not dependent on him. He can only ſecure the public order by Rules and Laws ſolely applicable to actions, and merely to ſuch actions too, as can be diſtinctly defined. Beſides, theſe laws ſhould be applicable to Society in a uniform manner; and they ſhould always have a tendency to diminiſh the number of exceptions, ſhades and modifications by which the characters of its members are diverſified, in order to prevent the abuſes inſeparable from arbitrary deciſions.

Such

Such is the procedure of ſovereign authority; ſuch the neceſſary diſplay of its means and its powers. Religion, to accompliſh the ſame ends, follows a very different courſe. It is not in a vague and general manner that ſhe influences the happineſs of men: It is by addreſſing them, as it were, one by one: By penetrating into the heart of each individual, and infuſing into the ſoul conſolation and hope: By preſenting to the imagination the ſtrongeſt attractions; and by taking poſſeſſion of mens opinions, and occupying their thoughts. Availing herſelf of this dominion over them, ſhe ſuſtains their courage, and affords them comfort under the diſappointments and afflictions incident to human life. In like manner, Religion contributes to the maintenance of public order, by means abſolutely diſtinct from thoſe employed by Government: For ſhe not only regulates our actions, but our ſentiments; checking the errors, and reſtraining the inclinations of each individual. By repreſenting the Deity as knowing every ſecret thought, and as preſent on all occaſions, ſhe exerts an habitual authority over the conſciences of men: She ſeems to watch over their emotions, and to purſue them in all their ſubterfuges: Equally attentive to their intentions, their actions and their remorſe, ſhe ſeems, in her varied courſe, as yielding and flexible, as the deſpotic empire of the law appears immoveable and conſtrained.

ful would be the event were the operation of that powerful ſpring ever entirely deſtroyed? Soon ſhould we ſee the whole ſocial ſtructure ſhaken from its foundation, and the hand of Government no longer able to ſuſtain the huge and tottering edifice.

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I ought not, in this place, to extend theſe reflections farther; but I muſt add, that if Religion, in ſome meaſure, completes the imperfect work of legiſlation,—if ſhe muſt ſupply the defect of thoſe means which Government is under the neceſſity of adopting, the ſubject of which I propoſe to treat, ſeems not to be foreign to thoſe objects of conſideration which the ſtudy of adminiſtration ought to comprehend.

I am well aware, that we cannot explain the importance of Religious Opinions, without, at the ſame time, fixing our attention on thoſe great truths on which they depend; and thus we muſt touch upon ſome queſtions cloſely connected with the deepeſt metaphyſics. We are, at leaſt, obliged to ſeek a defence againſt thoſe arguments which ſap the foundation of the moſt neceſſary opinions, and repreſs the moſt intereſting and impaſſioned ſentiments of the human mind: arguments by which ſome have attempted, to reduce man to a vegetable,—to make the exiſtence of the univerſe, the reſult of chance,—and morality, a mere ſtate trick.

When I foreſaw the immenſe latitude of my ſubject, I was, no doubt, intimidated; but I could not think this a ſufficient reaſon for relinquiſhing my undertaking: And ſince moſt of the philoſophers of the preſent times have united againſt

againſt thoſe opinions which the light of Nature itſelf ſeems to have rendered ſacred, it is become neceſſary to admit almoſt all who may offer themſelves to the combat; and even to ſelect a champion from the main body of the army, ſince thoſe of ſuperior rank have gone over to the enemy's camp.

Beſides there is no ſubject of contemplation which ſeems more proper to employ the attention of reflecting minds, than metaphyſical enquiries; for it is by thought alone that they can be fathomed. The light we obtain on this ſubject by acquired knowledge, is in ſome meaſure loſt, in the obſcure depths we muſt ſound, and in the vaſt ſpace we muſt traverſe, in ſearch of it: Thus it were better, perhaps, that every one ſhould enter at random into thoſe labyrinths where the paths already traced lead to no concluſion. Beſides I have often obſerved, even in thoſe ſtudies where the aſſiſtance of ſcience is indiſpenſible, that a certain value is due to the particular efforts of each genius, which, tracing out a path for itſelf, and indebted to Nature alone for its peculiar formation, preſerves in its progreſs a character of its own. It is then, and then only, that our mode of thinking becomes altogether diveſted of ſervility: And when thoſe principles which we deduce from reflection, coincide with the opinions of others, this conformity has

has nothing ſlaviſh in it, nor are the ſlighteſt marks of imitation recognizable.

In vain would man reſiſt the impreſſion of truth; in vain does he affect an abſurd indifference and contempt for ancient opinions: No idea can be more worthy of our ſerious meditations, nor is there any on which it may be more allowable to expatiate, according to the utmoſt of our intelligence and penetration, than that moſt ſublime one of a SUPREME BEING, to whom we are related: An idea, which though too immenſe for us to comprehend, yet every moment ſtrikes the ſoul with deep admiration, and fills the heart with elevated hope.

There are concerns, methinks, which may be conſidered as patriotic by all intelligent and feeling beings: And while the inhabitants of the ſame country, and the ſubjects of the ſame prince, are conſtantly engaged in one common plan of defence, the Citizens of the World ſhould, with an anxiety equally inceſſant, give every new and poſſible ſupport to thoſe exalted opinions on which the true dignity of their exiſtence is founded; and which guard their imagination from the hideous proſpect of an exiſtence without origin, action without liberty, and futurity without hope. Thus after having, I think,

proved

proved myſelf a citizen of France, by my adminiſtration and by my writings, I wiſh to unite myſelf to a community ſtill more extenſive,—that of the whole human race: In this manner may a perſon extend his utility through a wider circle, without withdrawing his affections from thoſe with whom he is more immediately connected, or neglecting his primary and moſt important duties. This happy privilege we derive from our thinking faculties, that ſpiritual portion of ourſelves which can comprehend the paſt, dart into futurity, and deeply intereſt itſelf in the deſtiny of men of all countries and of all ages. A veil is, no doubt, drawn over the greater part of thoſe truths which our curioſity would lead us to inveſtigate; but thoſe which a beneficent God has permitted us to diſcern, are amply ſufficient to guide and inſtruct us; and we cannot at all times divert our attention from them, without being guilty of ſupine negligence, and a total indifference to the ſuperior intereſts of men. How diminutive, indeed, do all things appear when compared with thoſe contemplations, which extend the ſpan of our exiſtence, and by detaching us from the duſt of the earth, ſeem to unite our ſouls to the infinity of ſpace, and our duration of a day to eternity itſelf! Above all, this is worthy of your conſideration, ye who poſſeſs ſenſibility,

and

and who feel the want of a Supreme Being, who look for that ſupport from him, ſo neceſſary to your weakneſs, who ſeek in him that guardian and protector, without whom, painful ſolicitude will perpetually aſſail you, and deſtroy thoſe ſoft and tender affections which conſtitute your happineſs.

I muſt ſay, there perhaps never was a period, when there was a more preſſing neceſſity for recalling to the minds of men, the high importance of religious ſentiments: For they are to be conſidered merely as prejudices, if we may give credit to the preſent ſpirit of licentiouſneſs and levity,—to the laws dictated by the faſhionable world, and what is ſtill more eſſential,—to thoſe philoſophical diſſertations which prompt and ſupport the fooliſh ſuggeſtions of fancy and vanity.

There is no form of Religion, doubtleſs, to which notions more or leſs myſtical have not been attached; nor in which thoſe opinions have not been taught and defended in a dictatorial manner, and in a tone of authority by no means proportioned to the evidence adduced in their ſupport. This being the caſe, there have, at all times, been diſputes about particular modes of worſhip which different nations have adopted:

But

But it is chiefly in the preſent age, that a certain claſs of men have ſprung up, of eminent wit and abilities, who, being intoxicated by the facility of their victory, have carried their ambition ſtill farther, and have daringly ventured to attack the reſerved body of that army of which the front ranks had already given way.

The ſtruggle between thoſe who would imperiouſly demand implicit aſſent to their opinions, with others who pretend they ought to reject every thing with diſdain that is not demonſtrated, will always be a fruitleſs combat, and can only be productive of blind averſion and unjuſt contempt. Some endeavour to injure their adverſaries, others only to humble them; while the good of mankind, and the true benefit of ſociety, are totally left out of view in the conteſt. Yes, the real love of uſeful truths, the impartial ſearch after them, and the deſire of pointing them out, theſe ſentiments, ſo amiable, ſo truly eſtimable, ſeem to be entirely unknown. I ſee, permit me to ſay it, I ſee at the oppoſite extremities of the arena, the ſavage inquiſitor, and the inconſiderate philoſopher: But neither the faggots lighted by the one, nor the deriſions of the other, will ever diffuſe any ſalutary inſtruction. In the eyes of a rational man, the ſeverities of the monks add no more to the ſway of

true

true religious ſentiments, than the jeſts of ſome licentious wits have effected a juſt triumph in favour of philoſophy.

Between ſuch oppoſite opinions, and amidſt ſo many deviations which are equally dangerous, we muſt endeavour to mark out our path. All the opinions of mankind are ſubject to change; and, now, when the minds of men are become, more than ever, averſe to maxims of intolerance, the fundamental principles of Religion chiefly need our ſupport. Such is the daily decay of theſe principles, that to prepare ſome means by which their uſe may be ſuperſeded, ſeems, at preſent, to be an object with the public in general. Of late we have heard of nothing but the neceſſity of compoſing a moral Catechiſm, in which no Religious Principles whatever ſhould be introduced,—thoſe antiquated reſources, which ought to have been, by this time, totally diſcarded.

Theſe principles might be more effectually attacked, could they ever be repreſented as uſeleſs for the maintenance of public order; and could the dull leſſons of political philoſophy be ſubſtituted in place of thoſe ſublime ideas, which, by the ſpiritual tie of Religion, bind the heart and mind to the pureſt morality. Let us examine

mine if we ſhould gain any thing by the exchange; let us ſee if the means propoſed can be put in competition with thoſe for which they are ſubſtituted, as being more ſolid and efficacious. Let us enquire, if this newly recommended doctrine, will diffuſe into the ſoul the ſame degree of conſolation; if it be calculated for thoſe hearts which are poſſeſſed of ſenſibility: Above all, let us conſider attentively, if it can be accommodated to the capacity, to the degree of intelligence, and to the ſocial ſituation of the greater part of mankind. In ſhort, when we take into view the various conſiderations which are connected, in one way or another, with the important ſubject we propoſe to treat, we cannot heſitate boldly to oppoſe, with all our might, the vain ambition of thoſe who, availing themſelves of ſuperior abilities, endeavour to deprive man of all his dignity, to place him on a level with the duſt under his feet, and to render his foreſight a puniſhment:—Unhappy and deplorable fate! from which, however, we are permitted to ſeek for a defence: Cruel and diſaſtrous opinion! which tears up by the root every thing around it; which relaxes the moſt neceſſary bands, and at once deſtroys the moſt delightful charm of life.

O Thou God unknown! but whoſe beneficent idea has ever filled my ſoul, If ever Thou throweſt a look on thoſe efforts which man can make to approach Thee, ſuſtain my reſolution, enlighten my underſtanding, exalt my thoughts, and reject not the deſire I have to unite ſtill more, if poſſible, the order and happineſs of Society, with an intimate and juſt conception of Thy divinity, and a lively conviction of this ſublime truth, that THOU ART!

ON

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

CHAP. I.

The connection of Religious Opinions with Public Order.

WE have no diſtinct knowledge of the origin of moſt political ſocieties. So ſoon, however, as hiſtory exhibits to us men united in a national body, we, at the ſame time, diſcover the eſtabliſhment of a public worſhip, and the application of religious opinions to ſupport the laws eſtabliſhed for the preſervation of good order and ſubordination. Religious ſentiments, by the ſanction of an oath, bind the people to the Magiſtrates, and the Magiſtrates to their engagements; they inſpire a ſacred reſpect for obligations contracted between Sovereigns; and theſe ſentiments, more powerfully than diſcipline, attach the Soldier to his Commander. In ſhort their influence on the manners of individuals, has produced many of thoſe great actions recorded

corded in hiſtory, many inſtances of noble diſintereſtedneſs, in which the Citizen has devoted himſelf to danger or death for his country. But as a philoſophy has, of late, ſprung up among the moſt enlightened nations, anxiouſly employed in derogating from the reſpect due to Religion, diſſertations on remote times, and the various ſyſtems they abſurdly attached to Religion, would become an endleſs ſource of controverſy. Let us then ſupport the cauſe we have undertaken to defend, by reaſoning alone,—that operation of the mind, which is common to all countries and to all ages. There is perhaps ſomething weak and ſervile in our wiſhing to derive aid from ancient opinions: Reaſon ought not, like vanity, to deck herſelf with old parchments, or diſplay a genealogical tree: More dignified in her walk, and proud of her immortal nature, ſhe ought to derive every thing from herſelf; and without depending on anceſtors, ſhe ſhould become, ſo to ſpeak, the contemporary of all ages.

It was reſerved particularly for the Philoſophers of the preſent age, to queſtion even the utility of Religion, and to endeavour to ſubſtitute in place of its energetic influence, the dull inſtructions of political philoſophy. Religion, ſay they, is a ſcaffolding fallen to ruins, it is time to give morality a more ſolid ſupport. But what ſhall that ſupport be? In order to diſcover it,

and

and to form a juſt idea of its nature, we muſt conſider particularly the various motives conducive to morality, which depend on the relative ſituations of men, and then eſtimate the kind and degree of aid that may be reaſonably expected from ſuch influence.

I think it is eaſy to conjecture what means thoſe philoſophers ſeek to employ, after renouncing the efficacious aid of Religion: They would avail themſelves, doubtleſs, of the connection which ſubſiſts between the intereſt of individuals and that of the public: They would make uſe of the authority of the laws, and hold out the terror of puniſhments; and they would, above all, rely on the aſcendency of public opinion, and the ambition which all men ought to have for the eſteem and approbation of others.

Let us examine thoſe different motives ſeparately; And, firſt, directing our attention to the connection of the *private* with the *public* intereſt, let us ſee if there ſubſiſts any real union between them; and if we can deduce from ſuch principles, any moral inſtructions which may prove truly efficacious.

Society is very far from being a perfect ſtructure. We can by no means conſider as an harmonious compoſition, the various connections which we daily witneſs; eſpecially the habitual contraſt of power and weakneſs,—ſlavery and

authority,—riches and poverty,—luxury and miſery: So many inequalities, and ſuch a motley piece, could not form an edifice reſpectable for the juſtneſs of its proportions.

Civil and political order has then nothing excellent in its own nature. We cannot perceive its advantages till we have accurately ſtudied, not only thoſe circumſtances of which the legiſlature muſt avail itſelf, but alſo the obſtacles which it muſt ſurmount. It is only by deep reflection, therefore, that we come to diſcover how thoſe ſingular connections, eſtabliſhed by the ſocial laws, form the ſyſtem beſt calculated to balance and unite ſuch an immenſe diverſity of intereſts. Here then occurs a weighty objection to the influence of political morality, 'That we muſt aſſume an abſtract and com-'plicated idea as the baſis of our love of order.' What effect would the ſcientific harmony of the great whole produce on a vulgar mind, when put in competition with the perpetual ſenſe of injuſtice and inequality, which ariſes from the aſpect of every part of the ſocial conſtitution, when viewed in a detached and partial manner? And how inconſiderable is the number of thoſe who are able to connect all the links of this vaſt chain?

In the beſt regulated ſocieties, ſome muſt, unavoidably, enjoy all the comforts and conveniencies of life, without toil and without trouble; others, and by far the greater number, muſt be obliged

obliged to earn, with the ſweat of their brows, the leaſt poſſible recompenſe for their labours, a ſcanty ſubſiſtence: Some will be attended in their ſickneſs, with all the care which officious tenderneſs and ſkill can afford, whilſt others are reduced, in a public hoſpital, to partake of thoſe moderate ſuccours which the humanity of the Sovereign provides for indigence: Some muſt be in a condition to laviſh on their family all the advantages of a long education, whilſt others, impatient to free themſelves of ſo burdenſome a charge, are conſtrained to watch the firſt dawn of bodily ſtrength, to employ their children in ſome profitable labour. In ſhort, the ſplendour of riches muſt ever form a contraſt with the rags of poverty. Such are the inevitable effects of the laws of private right. The principles of theſe truths, I have had an opportunity of diſcuſſing, in the work I compoſed on Adminiſtration and Political Economy; but I muſt here repeat them, ſince they appear to be ſo cloſely connected with other general views. The eminent power of property has a more extenſive influence than almoſt any other of our ſocial inſtitutions. This conſideration was applicable to the right of the people, in the regulations regarding the victual-trade: It ought to be kept in view in tracing the duties of adminiſtration; and it is ſtill more important to the preſent ſubject, while we exa-

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mine what ſpecies of moral inſtruction is moſt ſuitable to mankind.

In ſhort, ſince it is eſſential to the laws of civil right, to introduce and conſtantly ſupport an unequal diſtribution of property; ſince it is eſſential to thoſe laws, to reduce the moſt numerous claſs of mankind to the bare neceſſaries of life; the unavoidable conſequence of ſuch a conſtitution muſt be, to maintain, among men, habitual ſentiments of envy and jealouſy. In vain would it be urged, That theſe laws alone can excite men to labour, animate induſtry, prevent diſorder, and prove a check to acts of arbitrary authority. All theſe conſiderations, though, no doubt, ſufficient to determine the opinion and will of the legiſlature, cannot ſtrike, in the ſame manner, the abject wretch, without fortune, without reſources, and without hope. Such a man could never pay willing homage to the beauty of the great whole, while he found nothing allotted to him but deformity, meanneſs and contempt.

In the greater part of political reaſonings, men are miſled by reſemblances and analogies. The intereſt of ſociety is certainly compoſed of the intereſts of all its members: But it follows not from this explication, that there is an immediate and conſtant correſpondence between the general intereſt and the intereſt of individuals. Such approximation, ſuch identity, could only be applicable

plicable to an imaginary ſocial body, which might be repreſented as divided into ſeveral different parts, of which the rich might be conſidered as the head, the poor, the hands and the feet. Political ſociety, however, cannot be conſidered as one united body, except under ſome particular relations; while, with regard to others, it is divided into as many ramifications as there are individuals.

What is called the *General Intereſt*, is often ſuſceptible of many different conſtructions. It is indeed one of thoſe principles which we are accuſtomed to receive, and tranſmit to others, in their moſt ordinary acceptation, without perceiving the complex ideas of which they are compoſed, till we have analyſed them, in order to diſcover their conſequences; in the ſame manner, as the diverſity of colours in a ray of light, is not perceptible, till it is divided by the help of a priſm.

The ſtructure of the ſocial laws may be juſtly eſteemed one of our moſt admirable conceptions: Yet this ſyſtem is not ſo cloſely united in all its parts, that any remarkable derangement would be the neceſſary conſequence of a few irregular movements. A man who violates thoſe laws, does not quickly diſcover the influence of his actions on the ſocial intereſt: But he enjoys, or thinks he enjoys, immediate advantage from his crimes.

Were a Theatre to be on fire, it would, doubtleſs, be the general intereſt of the company that each ſhould retire in regular order; but if the perſons moſt diſtant from the entrance, believed they might eſcape ſooner from the danger, by forcing their way through the ſurrounding crowd, they would aſſuredly reſolve to commit that violence, unleſs prevented by coercive power. However, the advantage of being reſtrained to regularity in ſuch circumſtances, appears a more diſtinct and ſimple idea, than the univerſal importance of maintaining civil order in ſociety.

Government is the only natural defence of public order: The deſign of its inſtitution confines it to conſult the general welfare. But the need it has of great power to enforce the execution of its decrees, proves evidently, that it is the enemy of many, while it acts in the name of all.

It is then a mere illuſion, to hope that morality may be founded on the connection between public and private intereſt; or to imagine that the empire of the ſocial laws can ſubſiſt without the ſupport of Religion. The authority of theſe laws can have no deciſive influence, on perſons who were never intereſted in their eſtabliſhment. Although the moſt remote origin ſhould be aſcribed to the hereditary diſtinction of property; yet it is certain, that thoſe ſucceeding inhabitants

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of the earth who are indigent, being ſtruck with the unequal diviſion of its rich domains, and not perceiving any boundary or lines of ſeparation traced by nature, would have juſt cauſe of complaint. They would be entitled to ſay, 'All theſe 'compacts and partitions, this diverſity of lots, 'which procure to ſome abundance and repoſe, 'to others labour and poverty; indeed the whole 'of theſe laws are only advantageous to a few 'privileged perſons: We cannot therefore ſub-'mit to them, unleſs compelled by the fear of 'perſonal danger. Of what avail then,' would they aſk, 'are thoſe ideas of juſtice and injuſtice, 'of which we hear ſo much? What import 'thoſe diſſertations on the neceſſity of adopting 'certain regulations for the order of the ſociety? 'Our minds cannot aſſent to principles, which 'though general in theory, become particular in 'their application. We have the proſpect of retri-'bution and reward, while the principles of vir-'tue, of ſubmiſſion and forbearance, are connect-'ed with religious ſentiments,—while we be-'lieve ourſelves accountable to that Supreme 'Being, whoſe will and whoſe laws we adore; 'from whom we have received all things; 'and whoſe approbation is offered to us as a 'motive of emulation, and an object of recom-'pence: But if the contracted period of our 'life, ſhould limit our whole concerns and inte-'reſts within its narrow compaſs, and ſhould be

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'the boundary of all our views and our hopes, 'What reſpect could be due to thoſe whom na-'ture has formed our equals,—men ſprung from 'lifeleſs clay, like ourſelves, deſtined there to 'return, to ſink for ever, and mingle with us in 'the duſt? The rich have ſurely invented the 'laws of juſtice, that they might be the more 'ſecure uſurpers. Let them deſcend from their 'lofty ſituation; let them place themſelves on 'the ſame level with us; or, at leaſt, let them 'beſtow on us a more equal ſhare of fortune, 'and we ſhall then be enabled to perceive, that 'the laws of civil right are beneficial. Till 'then we ſhall have juſt reaſon to continue 'enemies to thoſe laws which we find ſo diſad-'vantageous. Beſides, we cannot comprehend 'how it is in the name of our own intereſt, that 'we are required to renounce the deſire of ſhar-'ing in that abundance which ſurrounds us.'

Such is the ſecret language which all men muſt hold, who are oppreſſed by the hardſhips of their lot; or even thoſe who, in their habitual ſtate of inferiority, feel themſelves continually hurt by the ſight of luxury and magnificence.

It would be difficult to combat theſe arguments, by endeavouring to depict in ſtrong colours, the vanity of all pleaſures, the deceitfulneſs of the greater part of thoſe objects which excite our ambition, and the languors which follow in their train. Theſe reflections have

doubtleſs

doubtleſs ſome weight and efficacy: But if we attentively conſider the ſubject, whatever deſerves the name of conſolation in this world, can be ſucceſsfully addreſſed only to ſouls that are prepared to receive it by ideas, more or leſs diſtinct, of religion and piety. For we cannot remove the obdurate and ſullen dejection of the unhappy and envious wretch, who has totally rejected all hopes of futurity: Rivetted entirely to the concerns of a life, which is for him eternity and the univerſe itſelf, he becomes a ſlave to the immediate impulſe of his paſſions, from which it is impoſſible to diſengage him. He can lay hold of no idea, however vague, on which he can found his hope; nor can he find any ſource of ſatisfaction. As reaſon itſelf requires the continual aid of the imagination, he can neither receive comfort from the condolence of his friends, nor from his own reflections.

Again, it may be maintained, that the diſtribution of happineſs and miſery is, in general, more equal than we commonly imagine. It might alſo be demonſtrated in a rational manner, that labour is preferable to indolence; and it might be pronounced with truth, that trouble and anxiety are often the concomitants of riches, while contentment of mind ſeems to accompany mediocrity of fortune. It muſt be acknowledged, at the ſame time, that theſe axioms can only

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appear juſt in the eye of the moraliſt, who conſiders man in a comprehenſive point of view, and reckons on a general proſpect of his whole life. Amidſt the ordinary courſe of our deſires and hopes, it is in vain that we attempt to excite exertion and induſtry by the expectation of riches, while we, at the ſame time, contemn thoſe riches, by undervaluing the pleaſures and advantages which they procure. Such ſubtle ideas, without exception, can never be applicable to real circumſtances. If deep reaſonings be, on ſome occaſions, employed with effect, to alleviate our regrets, their ſucceſs muſt depend on their being only oppoſed by ſhadows.

In ſhort, were all the ordinary obſervations on the deceitfulneſs and illuſions of riches and ſuperiority converted into precepts, yet would they not prevent uncultivated minds from being ſtruck by the evident inequality of condition, which appears between the rich and the poor. Here one would be apt to conclude, that one part of mankind have been made for the convenience of the other. The poor man employs his ſtrength and his time, to heap upon the opulent all the enjoyments of life; while the rich man, by giving in exchange a ſcanty ſubſiſtence, deprives himſelf of nothing, ſince the extent of his real wants is limited by the laws of nature. The equality can then only be eſtabliſhed by the laſſitude and apathy which proceeds

proceeds from the very enjoyment of pleaſures. But theſe diſguſts compoſe only the back ground in the picture of life. The common people do not perceive them; for never having known any thing but want, they can form no idea of the languors which ſucceed our various ſatieties.

Shall it then be raſhly concluded, ſince theſe diſtinctions of property obſtruct the eſtabliſhment of political morality, that we ſhould endeavour to aboliſh them? But even in thoſe remote ages, when the degrees of mens ability and knowledge were incomparably more on a level, mankind could neither preſerve a community of property, nor an equality in its diſtribution: How can it then be imagined, that thoſe primitive connections can be re-eſtabliſhed, at a period when the diſparity of riches is ſo immenſely increaſed, and at a time when the ſuperiority of rank and power is confirmed by the immoveable ſtrength of diſciplined armies?

Let us however ſuppoſe, that in the compoſition of an imaginary world, an exact diviſion ſhould be made of the poſſeſſions moſt eſteemed by mankind. Even in this caſe, in order to maintain a true ſyſtem of equality, it would be abſolutely neceſſary, that every one ſhould faithfully perform the duties impoſed on him by the univerſal rules of morality; becauſe that is incumbent on each individual, in return for the ſacrifice made by the whole members of the ſociety;

ſociety; and each private citizen muſt be compenſated by the community, for thoſe loſſes and inconveniencies to which he ſubjects himſelf.

It is alſo eſſential to obſerve, that it is not only the true perſonal intereſt, as diſcerned by an enlightened mind, that muſt be connected with the public order, but alſo the private intereſt, as perverted by the paſſions; and then a mere guide will not ſuffice: Some yoke muſt be impoſed,—ſome conſtant check muſt be abſolutely employed. Indeed nothing can be more chimerical than to pretend, that a man, hurried on by an impetuous imagination, can be reſtrained, by endeavouring to recal to his remembrance, ſome principles and inſtructions, which, in the terms of the academic theſis, ought to be the *reſult of analyſis, of methodizing, of the art of dividing, defining, developing and circumſcribing our ideas**.

It would then be a bold undertaking indeed, to attempt to conduct all mankind by reaſon alone, ſince the firſt thing which reaſon diſcovers is its own weakneſs. But when it is neceſſary to found on maxims which may be controverted,—when the ſtrong motive of perſonal intereſt muſt be oppoſed to a moral conſideration, which can have no influence but by the help of profound

* THESIS of the French Academy, when a prize was propoſed for the beſt Catechiſm of Morals, the inſtructions of which ſhould be founded on the Principles of Natural Right alone.

profound reflection, we call to mind the conduct of certain early economiſts, who, after eſtabliſhing extravagant principles on the monopolizing of grain, thought it unneceſſary to take any meaſures for preventing or ſuppreſſing popular commotions, till they ſhould actually happen.

I think that our falſe reaſonings on the union of the perſonal and public intereſt, proceed from applying to the preſent ſtate of ſociety, thoſe principles on which it was originally founded. Our confounding theſe principles, though very natural, is the ſource of a multitude of errors. Let us endeavour to make this propoſition plain, which at firſt ſeems difficult to be comprehended.—With this view, let us fancy for a moment, the ſpirits of the future generation aſſembled in an imaginary world. Let them be ſuppoſed ignorant, before their arrival on the earth, what individuals ſhall be born of parents loaded with the gifts of fortune, and what others ſhall be beſet by miſery from their cradle. Let them, however, be made acquainted with the principles and laws of civil right, and let the confuſion be repreſented, which would be the inevitable conſequence of a perpetual fluctuation in the diviſion of property. Thoſe individuals who are to compoſe the new generation, being equally uncertain of the lot reſerved for each by the accident of birth, will, no doubt, unanimouſly aſſent to the events which await them: And, at this inſtant,

inſtant, while the connections of ſociety have only a ſpeculative exiſtence, the private intereſt may, with juſtice, be ſaid to be united to that of the public. But this unity immediately ceaſes, when each individual being arrived on the earth, takes poſſeſſion of his lot. It is then no longer poſſible, that all the private intereſts ſhould concur to maintain thoſe vaſt gradations of rank and fortune which proceed from the chance of birth. And the multitude, to whoſe ſhare nothing has fallen but troubles and want, can only become reſigned to the inferiority of their condition, by principles of religion,—thoſe ſublime ſentiments, which alone can point out to them an eternal juſtice, and place them, in imagination, before time, and before the laws.

Nothing is eaſier than to eſtabliſh conditions, and enforce the obſervance of rules, at the inſtant when a lottery is to be drawn. The adventurers, having the ſame object in view, think all fair, juſt and proper, and peace reigns by common agreement: But as ſoon as the blanks and prizes are known, their minds change, their tempers grow ſour; and without the reſtraint of authority, they would become unmanageable, envious, quarrelſome, and ſometimes unjuſt and violent.

We now ſee, in conſequence of what has been ſaid, that a political Society in contemplation, and in reality, offers to our view two very different

ferent periods. Theſe periods not being ſeparated by any apparent limits, are almoſt always confounded in the mind of the political moraliſt. He who believes in the union of private intereſt with that of the public, and who celebrates that harmony, views only the general and original plan of Society; he who, on the other hand, thinks every thing amiſs and diſcordant, becauſe there are great differences of power and fortune among men, has conſidered Society only under its actual viciſſitudes. Both theſe miſtakes have been adopted by celebrated writers. We might expect that a man* hurried on by a lively imagination, and ſtrongly impreſſed by preſent objects, would attend to nothing but the inequality of conditions in Society; while the Philoſopher †, who, tranſported by his abſtractions beyond the circle of human ſociety, perceives only the principles which have regulated the firſt formation of civil laws. Thus, in moſt caſes, diſputes depend on placing the ſubject in different poſitions and in various lights. In the moral world there are ſo many ſtations, that the picture entirely changes, according to the point of view which we chooſe.

* The tranſlator ſuppoſes that the Author here alludes to ROUSSEAU.

† Perhaps MONTESQUIEU.

HITHERTO we have endeavoured to inveſtigate the effect which might be expected from a ſyſtem of morality, the inſtructions of which are addreſſed to thoſe who have the moſt enlightened views of private intereſt: It now remains to ſhow, that no plan of education which requires time and reflection, can be adapted to the moſt numerous claſs of mankind. To be convinced of this fact, we need only turn our attention to the condition of thoſe who are deſtitute of property, and void of talents to ſupply its place. Obliged to have recourſe to hard labour, where the exertion of natural ſtrength is alone requiſite,—their own conſent, and the power of the opulent, reduce the wages of this numerous claſs, to what is barely equal to the neceſſaries of life. They cannot without difficulty ſupport their children; and they are ſo impatient to employ them in ſome profitable occupation, that it is impoſſible they ſhould be ſent to public ſchools, except during their early infancy. Thus ignorance and poverty are in the midſt of our ſocieties, and the hereditary lot of the greater part of mankind. There is no relaxation of this general law, except in thoſe countries where Government encourages the high price of labour, and thus affords the people ſome means of reſiſting the deſpotiſm of fortune. Such being the inevitable effect of our civil and political legiſlation, How can we hope to prevail with all men, without diſtinction, to agree

agree in maintaining public order, by inſtructions, not merely complicated, but which require thoſe to whom they are addreſſed, to proceed through a tedious train of previous reaſoning, in order to comprehend them. It would not then be ſufficient to beſtow ſalaries on inſtructors, it would be alſo requiſite to pay the ſcholars for their time; ſince, for the lower claſs, even very early in life, time is the only means of ſubſiſtence.

Morality is not, like other human ſciences, a ſpecies of knowledge which we are free to acquire at our leiſure. The earlieſt inſtruction is ſtill too late, ſince man has a natural power to do miſchief, before his mind becomes capable of reflection, or of connecting the moſt ſimple ideas.

A political catechiſm would not then be proper for the inſtruction of the people; nor could a ſeries of precepts founded on the union of public and private intereſt be accommodated to their underſtanding. Though ſuch a doctrine were to appear as juſt, as it ſeems to me liable to be diſputed, its principles can never be rendered ſufficiently ſimple and diſtinct, to make a proper impreſſion on thoſe whoſe education continues for ſo ſhort a time. Morality, founded on Religion, makes its way ſo directly to the human heart, as to be perfectly ſuited to the particular ſituation of each individual. So happily

pily is it adapted to this purpoſe that it would ſeem to be deſtined for it by one of thoſe great Laws which regulate the order of the univerſe. Religion alone has power to perſuade with celerity, becauſe it excites our feelings, whilſt it informs the underſtanding; becauſe it alone is capable of rendering obvious what it recommends; in ſhort, becauſe it ſpeaks in the name of God; and it is eaſy to inſpire reſpect for Him whoſe power is every where evident to the eyes of the ſimple and the ſkilful, of children and men advanced to maturity.

In order to controvert this truth, let it not be alleged, that the idea of a God is of all others the moſt incomprehenſible; and that if uſeful inſtructions may be derived from a principle ſo metaphyſical, a much greater effect may be expected from precepts which are founded on the common relations of life. Such an objection is a mere ſubtility. The diſtinct knowledge of the eſſence of a God, the Creator of the world, is, no doubt, above the comprehenſion of men, of every age and of all faculties: This, however, is not the caſe, with the general idea of a heavenly Power, who puniſhes and who rewards. Parental authority, and the helpleſſneſs of infancy, prepare us early for ideas of obedience and command: And the world is ſuch a ſtupendous wonder, a theatre of ſuch continual prodigies, that it is eaſy to annex, at an early period,

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hope and fear to the conception of a Supreme Being. The infinity of a God, Creator and Director of the univerſe, is then ſo far from tending to divert our reſpect and adoration, that the obſcurity with which He is enveloped lends a new force to religious ſentiments. A man often remains cool and unconcerned amidſt the diſcoveries of his reaſon; but his paſſions are readily affected by the power of imagination: For this faculty of our ſoul excites us to continual activity, by preſenting to the mind an unbounded proſpect, and by keeping us always at a certain diſtance from our purpoſe. Man is naturally diſpoſed to revere a power of which he cannot trace the origin. This innate diſpoſition obliges us carefully to guard children in their education, againſt the inſinuation of the various imaginary terrors of which they are ſuſceptible. Thus, not only the true idea of an All-powerful God, but the mere credulous faith in ſuperſtitious opinions, will always have more influence on the inferior claſs of men, than abſtract precepts, or general conſiderations. I believe it might even be ſaid, with truth, that the future of this ſhort life, when we contemplate it, appears more diſtant than the ſublime perſpective offered to the mind by Religion: Becauſe that grand proſpect deeply intereſts our feelings,—and the minuteſt deſcription of reaſon can never equal in power, the impulſive ardour of the emotions of the heart.

I reſume the train of my reflections; and will here offer an important remark: That the more the increaſe of taxes keeps the people in deſpondency and miſery, it becomes the more indiſpenſable to give them a religious education: For, while we are irritated by adverſity, we have moſt need of a powerful reſtraint and of daily conſolations. Succeſſive abuſes of ſtrength and authority, by overturning all the relations which originally exiſted among men, have raiſed an artificial and diſproportioned ſtructure. Thus the idea of a God is become more neceſſary than ever, in order to level this confuſed aſſemblage of diſparities. Were we even to imagine, that a people ſhould exiſt, ſubject only to the laws of political morality, we ſhould certainly repreſent a riſing nation, reſtrained by the prime vigour of patriotic virtue,—a nation in which riches had not yet been accumulated,—where the diſtance of the habitations from each other, contributed to maintain the order of families,—where agriculture, that ſimple and peaceable occupation, would be the favourite employment,—where the work of the hands would obtain a recompence proportioned to the ſcarcity of the workmen, and the extenſive uſefulneſs of the labour; we ſhould, in ſhort, repreſent a nation where the laws and form of Government, would, for a long time, favour equality of rank and property. But in our ancient kingdoms of Europe, thoſe old

old political bodies, where men are crowded together, the increaſe of riches continually augments the difference of fortunes, and the diſtance of conditions,—and miſery and magnificence are conſtantly mingled. It muſt, therefore, be a morality fortified by Religion, that ſhall reſtrain theſe numerous ſpectators of ſo much riches, and ſo many objects of envy,—who ſee, within their reach, all that they fancy neceſſary to happineſs, yet muſt never hope to obtain it.

It may, perhaps, be aſked, in conſequence of theſe reflections, Whether Religion, which ſtrengthens every tie, and fortifies every obligation, is not favourable to tyranny? Such a concluſion would be abſurd. However, Religion, which comforts us under all afflictions, would alſo ſoothe the ills which ariſe from deſpotiſm; but it is neither the origin nor the ſupport of it. Religion, well underſtood, would only give its ſanction to order and juſtice: And the inſtructions of political morality have the ſame end in view. Thus, in both plans of education, the rights of the Sovereign, as well as thoſe of the Citizens, conſtitute ſimply one of the elementary parts of the general ſyſtem of our duties.

I ſhall only further remark, that the inſufficiency of political morality would appear ſtill more obvious in a nation, ſubject to an arbitrary prince, where the people would have no ſhare in the Government: For the perſonal and pu-

blic intereſts, not being habitually connected, it were to be feared, that by holding out the union of theſe two intereſts as the eſſential motive of virtue, the greater number of diſciples would only retain this part of the precept, That a regard to private intereſt was admitted for the firſt principle. Every one would, conſequently, aſſume to himſelf the right of judging of the times and circumſtances when ſelfiſhneſs and patriotiſm are to be ſeparated, and when they are to be united. What a ſource of errors might not this become? Public good, like other abſtract ideas, cannot be preciſely defined. To the greater part of mankind, it appears a ſea without bounds; and it requires not much addreſs or ſubtility to confound all our analogies. One may judge how we might model, according to our taſte, the alliance of all the moral ſentiments, by conſidering with what facility men find the means of reconciling with ſome good quality, the habitual faults of their character. He who wounds without diſcretion, values himſelf on his frankneſs and courage: He who is cowardly and timid in his words and ſentiments, boaſts of his caution and circumſpection; and by a new refinement, of which I have ſeen ſome ſingular inſtances, he who aſks of his Sovereign pecuniary favours, endeavours to perſuade him that he is impelled to this ſolicitation, only by a noble deſire of honourable diſtinction. Every one is ingenious in diſcovering

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the point of union which connects his paſſions with ſome virtue: Would they then be leſs expert in finding out ſome conformity between their own intereſt and that of the public?

I confeſs, I cannot, without a degree of diſguſt and horror, figure to myſelf a political ſociety, whereof the members, without any governing principle, are only reſtrained by the pretended connection of their private intereſt with the general good. What partial judges! What multiplicity of opinions, ſentiments and wills! All would be in confuſion, if men were left at liberty to draw their own concluſions. They muſt abſolutely have one ſimple idea for the rule of their conduct, eſpecially when the application of this rule may be infinitely diverſified. When God delivered his laws from Mount Sinai, he needed only to ſay, '*Thou ſhalt not ſteal*': And with the tremendous idea of that God, whom all nature calls to our mind, whom every thing impreſſes on the human heart, this ſhort commandment preſerves at all times a ſufficient authority: But when political Philoſophy ſays, '*Thou ſhalt not ſteal*', it ought to add to this precept a train of reaſoning on the laws of right, on the inequality of conditions, and on the various ſocial relations; and to perſuade us, it ought to recount every motive, obviate every objection, and repel all attacks. It would even be neceſſary, that by the leſſons of this Philoſophy

ſophy, the moſt uncultivated minds ſhould be qualified to follow the various ramifications which unite, disjoin, and reunite, afreſh, the public to the private intereſt. What an enterpriſe! It is perhaps ſomewhat like attempting to employ a courſe of anatomy, in order to direct a child in the choice of proper aliments, inſtead of beginning to conduct it by the counſels and authority of its mother.

The ſame remarks are applicable to all the virtues, of which the obſervance is eſſential to public order. What a taſk would it be to perſuade a gallant, by reaſoning alone, that he ought not to deprive a huſband of the affections of his wife? Where would you aſſign him a diſtinct recompence for the ſacrifice of his paſſion? What elaborate arguments would be requiſite, in demonſtrating to an ambitious man that he ought not, in ſecret, to calumniate his rival,—to the ſolitary miſer, armed with indifference, that he ought not ſo anxiouſly to avoid every opportunity of doing good,—to a man of an ardent and vindictive temper, that he ought not to yield to the impulſe of his paſſions,—to a needy man that he ought not to have recourſe to falſehood and deceit, to better his condition? And how many other poſitions would offer the ſame or ſtill greater difficulties? Abſtract ideas, however well arranged, can only convince us by the longeſt method, ſince the peculiar nature

ture of theſe ideas is to diſengage our reaſoning from ſenſible objects, and conſequently from ſtriking and ſudden impreſſions. Beſides, political morality, like every thing which proceeds from the mind alone, would be conſidered by us as a mere matter of opinion: An opinion from which we ſhould have right to appeal, at any time, to the tribunal of our reaſon. The leſſons of men are only repreſentations of their judgment; and the opinions of ſome, influence not the will of others. There is no principle of morality, which relates only to what is abſolutely human, that would not be ſuſceptible of ſome exception or modification: And there is nothing more complicated than the idea of the connection between virtue and happineſs. In ſhort, while the mind cannot, without difficulty, comprehend the nature of that connection, the objects of our paſſions are every where apparent, and all our ſenſes are pre-engaged by them. The miſer beholds gold and ſilver: The ambitious man thoſe honours which are conferred on others: The debauchee, the objects of his luxury: Virtue has nothing left but reaſoning; and ought, therefore, to be ſupported by religious ſentiments, and by the pleaſing hopes which accompany them.

In a government then, in which political morality was ſubſtituted for a religious education, it would become indiſpenſably neceſſary to exclude

clude men from all information calculated to exalt their minds: It would be requiſite to divert their attention from the various competitions which excite ſelf-love and ambition: They muſt withdraw themſelves from the ſociety of women: And it would be incumbent on them to aboliſh the uſe of money, that alluring and univerſal repreſentative of all our gratifications. In ſhort, by depriving men of religious hopes, and all thoſe motives to virtue which the imagination preſents, every exertion muſt be uſed to prevent that unguarded imagination from promoting vice, and encouraging all the paſſions contrary to public order. It was becauſe Telemachus was accompanied by a Divinity, that he could ſafely viſit the ſumptuous court of Seſoſtris, and the enchanting abodes of Eucharis and Calypſo.

In the gay, thoughtleſs, and headſtrong period of youth, the authority of a guide is peculiarly neceſſary. In order, then, to paſs with ſafety through that ſeaſon of ſecurity and danger, we need *principles* which may command, not merely *reflections* to counſel us; theſe can only have influence in proportion to the vigour of the underſtanding; and the underſtanding cannot be formed without experience and a long conflict of opinions.

Religious inſtructions have the peculiar advantage of intereſting our imagination and our feelings

feelings, to the influence of which we are particularly ſubject in our early years. Thus though we could eſtabliſh a courſe of political morality, ſufficiently ſupported by reaſon, for defending men advanced to maturity from vice, I ſhould ſtill ſay that ſuch a philoſophy would not be ſuitable to youth, for whom this armour would be too heavy.

In ſhort, the leſſons of human wiſdom, which cannot govern us during the ardour of our paſſions, are equally inſufficient when we are exhauſted by diſeaſe, and no longer able to comprehend a variety of relations: But, ſo pleaſing are the emotions which the voice of Religion excites, that in the gradual decline of our faculties, we can ſtill liſten to it.

If we were perſuaded, however, that there was on earth a more certain encouragement to virtue than religious ſentiments, their powers would be immediately weakened; they can neither intereſt us nor govern us in a partial manner; and if they did not, as we may ſay, overflow the human heart, all their influence would vaniſh.

Religious inſtruction, while it aſſembles all the means proper to excite men to virtue, neglects not, it is true, to point out the connection that ſubſiſts between the obſervance of the laws of morality and the happineſs of life; but theſe conſiderations are only preſented as acceſſary motives

tives, and it is not neceſſary to ſupport them by ſuch ſtrong proofs as a fundamental principle requires. Beſides, when people are early taught, that vices and crimes lead to miſery on earth, theſe doctrines can only make a laſting impreſſion, in ſo far as we are able to convince them of the conſtant influence of a Providence, over all the events of this world.

It is by no means incumbent on religious inſtructors to demonſtrate, that all the advantages which men ſo eagerly purſue, are always the immediate conſequences of obſerving the laws of order; for this important reaſon, That acts of ſelf-denial, ſupported by an idea of duty, are changed into real pleaſures. The inward feelings, indeed, which the virtuous enjoy from piety, compoſe an eſſential part of their happineſs. But what conſolatory reflection can a man have in his own breaſt, what ſelf-approbation can be afforded him, when he knows no other authority than that of political morality, and when virtue is only a coincidence of the private with the public intereſt?

The object and ultimate end of Religion is certainly the happineſs of mankind. This happineſs being placed at a diſtance, Religion conducts us to it by ſalutary reſtrictions and temporary ſacrifices. It is converſant only with the moſt ſublime part of our exiſtence, that which detaches us from the preſent moment to connect us with futurity. It offers us hopes, which ſufficiently

ficiently diſengage us from our worldly concerns, to prevent us from yielding implicitly to inordinate deſires, and to the tyranny of our paſſions. Irreligion, on the contrary, whoſe leſſons teach us that we are only maſters of the preſent moment, contracts us ſtill more within ourſelves; and there is nothing either good or agreeable in ſuch a condition: For greatneſs of every kind, depends on the extent of thoſe relations which we comprehend; and, in this reſpect, our feelings and intellect are ſubjected to the ſame laws.

Thoſe who would repreſent religious obligations as a matter of indifference, aſſure us that we may ſafely repoſe the maintenance of morality on ſome general ſentiments which we have adopted. They do not, however, conſider, that theſe ſentiments derive almoſt all their force and weight from that ſpirit of religion which they deſire to weaken. Yes, even humanity, that endearing emotion of a noble ſoul, is animated and fortified by the idea of a Supreme Being. The alliance between men depends but little on conformity of ſtructure and organization; nor can it be attributed to the ſimilitude of their paſſions,—that continual ſource of ſo much hatred: It depends eſſentially on our connection with the ſame Author, the ſame Superintendent, the ſame Judge. It is founded on the equality of our right to the ſame hopes, and on that train of duties

inculcated

inculcated by education, and rendered reſpectable by the habitual dominion of religious opinions. It muſt, alas! be confeſſed, that men are ſo faulty, ſo unjuſt, ſelfiſh and ungrateful, in the eyes of thoſe who have obſerved them collectively, that we never can maintain harmony amongſt them by the mere leſſons of human wiſdom. We do not always reliſh ſuch inſtruction becauſe it is amiable, but very often, only becauſe we are conſcious, that it merits our eſteem. Yes, even goodneſs and forbearance, thoſe ſimple qualities, ſtill need to be adjuſted, from time to time, with a general and predominant idea, which is the band of all our virtues. We are ſo much hurt, in various ways, by the paſſions of others, and our ſelf-love is often ſo ſtrong and ſo deeply rooted, that we have need of ſome ſuccour, to enable us, at all times, to maintain generous ſentiments, and a true concern for the welfare of our fellow mortals.

In ſhort, it muſt be confeſſed, that if a man ſhall once come to conſider himſelf as a being that is the child of chance, or of blind neceſſity, and tending only to the duſt from whence he ſprung, he muſt neceſſarily deſpiſe himſelf. Far from aſpiring at elevated and virtuous ſentiments, he would conſider this ſort of ambition as a fantaſtic idea, which conſumes in a vain, illuſory manner, a part of thoſe fleeting minutes which he has to paſs on earth: And all his attention being

being fixed on the ſhortneſs of life, and on the eternal ſilence which muſt cloſe the ſcene, he would only think *how to devour this reign of a moment.*

How dangerous then would it be, to ſhow mankind the extremity of the chain which unites them together! By knowing the ultimate boundary of their expectations, men become ungrateful towards thoſe from whom they no longer expect any thing; and the ſame ſentiment would weaken the power of morality, if our leaſe of exiſtence were manifeſtly only for this world. Religion, then, alone can ſtrengthen thoſe ties, and defend the entire ſyſtem of our moral duty, againſt the ſtratagems of reaſoning, and the ſubtilties of wit. To oblige mankind to conſider the laws of morality with due reſpect, they muſt be early taught that the ſocial virtues are an homage rendered to the perfections and to the beneficent intentions of the Sovereign Author of Nature,—that Infinite Being, who is pleaſed with the preſervation of order, and with the private ſacrifices which the accompliſhment of this grand deſign requires. But when I ſee modern Philoſophers trace, with an able hand, the general plan of our duties,—when I ſee them determine with accuracy the reciprocal obligations of citizens,—and when, at laſt, they give for the baſis of this legiſlation, ſelf-intereſt and the love of praiſe, I recollect the ſyſtem of thoſe Indian

Philoſophers, who having ſtudied the revolutions of the heavenly Bodies, and being at a loſs to determine what power ſuſtained the vaulted firmament, thought they had obviated the difficulty, by placing the univerſe on the back of an Elephant, and this Elephant on the back of a Tortoiſe. We ſhall imitate theſe philoſophers, and like them, proceed only by degradation, if we ever attempt to form a chain of duties and moral principles, of which the ultimate link is not placed above worldly conſiderations, and beyond the limits of our ſocial conventions.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The ſame Subject continued. A parallel between the influence of Religious Principles, and the effect of Laws and Opinions.

HAVING examined, in the preceding chapter, whether it were poſſible to found morality on the connection of the private with the public intereſt, we come now to conſider, whether the puniſhments inflicted by the Sovereign, and the ſway of public opinion, have ſufficient power to reſtrain mankind, and attach them to the obſervance of their duty.

We ſhould proceed by common ideas, that we may advance gradually in the inveſtigation of the truth: We ought then, firſt to recollect here, That the penal laws can only be applied to ſuch offences as are known and proved. This ſingle conſideration contracts their power within very narrow limits. But it is not merely crimes ſecretly committed, which are beyond the cognizance of the law; we muſt alſo place in this rank, every reprehenſible action, which, having no preciſe character, can admit of no diſtinct definition. Of theſe there are a prodigious num-

ber; The rigour of parents, and the ingratitude of children; the cruel neglect of ſervants; treachery in friendſhip; the violation of domeſtic comfort; diſunion ſown in the boſom of families; levity of principles in every ſocial connection; perfidious counſels; artful and ſlanderous inſinuations; rigorous exerciſe of authority; favour and partiality of judges,—their inattention, negligence and ſeverity; endeavours to obtain places of importance with a conſciouſneſs of incapacity; corrupt and feigned adulation offered to princes or miniſters; the indifference of ſtateſmen to the public good,—their mean and pernicious jealouſies, and thoſe political diſſentions which they excite, with a view to encreaſe their own importance; wars inſtigated by ambition; intolerance under the falſe ſhew of zeal: And in ſhort, many other fatal evils which the law can neither follow nor deſcribe, and which may be productive of the greateſt miſchiefs, before they become liable to public cenſure. We cannot indeed wiſh that this cenſure ſhould paſs certain bounds, becauſe authority when applied to obſcure faults, or to ſuch as may be ſuſceptible of various interpretations, eaſily degenerates into tyranny. And as there is nothing ſo ſubtil as thought, nothing ſo ſecret as our ſentiments, no other than an inviſible power, whoſe authority ſeems to participate of the divine influence, has a right to enter into the ſecrets of our hearts.

A man can only be interrogated at the tribunal of his own conſcience, with regard to many actions and intentions which eſcape the vigilance of Government. Let us beware of aboliſhing the authority of this active and upright judge; let us beware of weakening it voluntarily, by imprudently truſting all to ſocial diſcipline alone. The power of conſcience is, I will venture to ſay, more neceſſary in the preſent age, than at any preceding period. Though ſociety no longer preſents to our view thoſe vices and crimes which ſhock us by their deformity; yet licentiouſneſs of morals, and refinement of manners, have, often by imperceptible ſhades, ſo nearly approximated good and evil, vice and decency, falſehood and truth, ſelfiſhneſs and affected generoſity, that it is become more important than ever to oppoſe this hidden depravity by an interior authority,—a power which may pry into the myſterious intricacies of diſguiſe, and whoſe action may be as penetrating as our diſſimulation ſeems artful and well concerted.

A ſimilar authority, appears to be abſolutely neceſſary for the maintenance of public order; and it is, undoubtedly, for this reaſon, that ſeveral philoſophic writers have aſſumed a like principle amidſt their Atheiſm. In ſuch a ſyſtem all is wild theory. They talk of our bluſhing at the recollection of our follies, of dreading our own ſecret reproaches, and of fearing the

condemnation, which, on calm reflection, we ſhall pronounce againſt ourſelves. Thoſe ſentiments, ſo powerful, when accompanied with the belief of a God, can be referred to no certain principles, when we take intereſt for our ſole guide, and aboliſh all the important connections that are maintained among men by religious opinions; *conſcience* muſt then become a term without meaning, a word of no import in the language. We may indeed feel remorſe, that is to ſay regret, at being deceived in our purſuits of ambition,—in the promotion of our intereſt,—in the choice of means employed to obtain the reſpect and praiſe of others; or, in ſhort, in the various plans we form for our worldly advantage: But ſuch remorſe is only an exaltation of our ſelf-love. We deify, as it were, our judgment and underſtanding, and we, at laſt, make all our actions appear before theſe falſe idols, to reproach us with our errors and weakneſſes. We thus voluntarily torment ourſelves; but when this perſecution too long importunes us, we have it in our power to command our tyrants to be more indulgent. The caſe is very different with the reproaches of conſcience. The ſentiments which produce them are neither compounded nor artificial. We cannot corrupt our judge, nor enter into any compromiſe with him; and thoſe things which ſeduce mankind can never

never deceive him. Even in the giddineſs of proſperity, and amidſt the intoxication of the greateſt ſucceſs, his looks are inevitably fixed on us, and we cannot without terror enjoy the applauſe and the triumphs we have not merited.

Several modern writers have laid it down as a maxim, That with good laws we ſhould always have morality ſufficient; but I cannot adopt this opinion. Man is a being ſo compounded and his relations with his ſpecies are ſo various and ſubtil, that to regulate his mind, and direct his conduct, he needs a multitude of ſentiments on which the commands of the Sovereign can have no influence. Simple and declared duties only, have been reduced to precepts by the legiſlators; and there are innumerable vacancies in that rough pile, termed *civil laws*. The laws demand merely an implicit obedience; And as they enjoin or prohibit actions alone, being abſolutely indifferent to the private ſentiments of men, the moral ſtructure which they raiſe, is, in many parts, a mere exterior form; and they ſeem to have begun, if I may ſo ſpeak, at the top of the edifice. Religion proceeds in a direct contrary manner. It is in the heart,—in the deep receſſes of conſcience, that ſhe places the firſt baſe: She ſeems to poſſeſs the grand ſecret of nature: She ſows in the earth a ſeed, which is there nouriſhed, encreaſed and transformed into numerous branches; and theſe, without any effort,

ſpring up and extend themſelves to all dimenſions, and in various forms.

Let us ſuppoſe, however, that it were ſufficient for the maintenance of public order, to reduce morality to the ſpirit of the civil laws; yet it would not be in the power of man to deduce from this aſſimilation, familiar inſtructions proper to form a code of education: For theſe laws, though ſimple in their commands, are not ſo in their principles. We perceive not, at firſt view, why the moſt juſt revenge ſhould be prohibited; why we have not the power to enforce the reſtitution of our property, by the ſame means the plunderer has uſed in ſeizing it; why we have not right to reſiſt with violence the tyrannic oppreſſor; in ſhort, why certain actions, ſome indifferent in themſelves, and ſome hurtful to others, are condemned in a general and uniform manner. Some comprehenſion indeed is neceſſary, to diſcover that the legiſlator has departed from our natural ideas, in order that every perſon might not become a judge in his own cauſe, and to prevent each individual member of ſociety from determining by his own judgment, thoſe exceptions and diſtinctions of which every circumſtance is ſuſceptible. In the ſame manner, from motives not at firſt obvious, the laws treat with more rigour an offence which cannot be eaſily detected, than a crime more reprehenſible in itſelf, but of which the enormity

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is more palpable. The laws obſerve the ſame rule with regard to crimes proceeding from the greateſt incitements, though our yielding to theſe, might appear a palliative circumſtance in the view of ſimple juſtice. In ſhort, the laws, by adopting a determinate method of conſtraining debtors to diſcharge their obligations, prove that they are not compaſſionate to unforeſeen misfortunes, nor actuated by other motives of equity which merit equal conſideration. All their attention is fixed on the connection which engagements have with thoſe political reſources that ariſe from commerce and its tranſactions. Thus, there exiſts a multitude of prohibitions, of penalties and gradations of puniſhments, which depend only on the general views of legiſlation, and agree not with the circumſcribed good ſenſe which determines the judgment of individuals. It is then often from very extenſive and complicated conſiderations, that actions are judged reprehenſible in the eye of law. It is impoſſible, therefore, to erect on this baſe alone, a ſyſtem of morality, of which every one can have a clear perception. And ſince the Legiſlator carefully avoids ſubmitting any thing to the determination of individuals, and often ſacrifices natural juſtice to this principle, How then can he wiſh, at the ſame time, to give us for a rule of conduct a political morality altogether founded on reaſoning?

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We may further obſerve, that to the greater number of men, the ſenſe of the laws and the decrees formed by thoſe who interpret them, muſt neceſſarily appear to be blended, and united, ſo as to form only one object: And, as the judges are frequently liable to error, the true ſpirit of legiſlation remains often in obſcurity, and cannot be diſcerned without difficulty.

The laws being the work of our underſtanding, we are, on that account, perhaps, diſpoſed to grant them a univerſal dominion. But I confeſs, I am ſo far from thinking that they can ever be ſubſtituted inſtead of the ſalutary influence of religion, that I believe them inadequate to regulate thoſe things which are immediately ſubjected to their authority. Thus we ſhould conſider, if the unhappy errors with which we reproach criminal tribunals, do not originate from the faults committed by ſovereign authority; while it has referred all the duties of the judges to the injunctions of the law, and while it has refuſed further to confide in the conſcience and private ſentiments of the Magiſtrate.

Let us illuſtrate this obſervation by a ſingle example, ſelected from many others. Suppoſe it were now required that the Legiſlator ſhould, of new, decide the important queſtion, with regard to the credit due to the evidence of witneſſes: Will

Will he not always be in hazard of error, whether he abſolutely rejects ſuch an indication of truth, or whether he makes the fate of a criminal depend upon it? How can he ſay, that the teſtimony of an honeſt man, deſcribing or identifying the perſon of his aſſaſſin, ſhould go for nothing with the judge? And how can he pretend, that a teſtimony of this kind is ſufficient to determine a condemnation, when he who gives the evidence appears ſuſpicious, from his bad reputation, from the motives which we may ſuppoſe to actuate him, or from the improbability of his aſſertion? The right courſe is then placed between theſe two extremes: But intermediate ideas are not conſonant with the abſolute language of law; we ought, therefore, in ſuch circumſtances to leave much to the wiſdom and integrity of the magiſtrate. So far from ſerving innocence by acting otherwiſe, we viſibly endanger it; for judges become habituated to account the law reſponſible for every thing; and, thus they implicitely obey the *letter*, inſtead of obſerving the *ſpirit* of it,—which is the anxious deſire of obtaining truth. What! ſome may exclaim, Do you wiſh that there ſhould be no poſitive inſtruction to ſerve as a guide in the examination of crimes, or to determine the character by which theſe crimes may be diſtinguiſhed? I mean not to ſay ſo; but I could wiſh, in a matter ſo important, that there ſhould be united to the inſtructions

ſtructions which the prudence of the Legiſlator has given, thoſe hints which the ſagacity of the judges may afford,—I could wiſh that the criminal law had preſcribed to magiſtrates, not all that they are obliged to do, but all that they ought not to omit doing,—not only all that is ſufficient to determine their opinion, but alſo what ought to be the indiſpenſable condition of a capital puniſhment. Tempered by ſuch a ſpirit, the commands given by the law would be an excellent ſafeguard againſt the ignorance or poſſible prevarication of the judges. But as no general rule nor immutable principle is applicable to an infinite diverſity of circumſtances, I would give to innocence a new defence, by more immediately intereſting the morality of the judges to ſearch for and inveſtigate the truth. To remind them continually of the whole extent of their obligations, I could wiſh, that previous to their paſſing a ſentence of condemnation, raiſing one of their hands towards heaven, they ſhould pronounce, in a ſolemn and earneſt manner, theſe words, 'I atteſt that the man accuſed be-'fore us, appears to me guilty, both according 'to the rules of law, and according to my own 'private judgment.' It is not ſufficient that a judge ſhould be required to examine with probity, if the proofs of an offence are conformable to thoſe which the ſtatute repreſents as the indication of truth; a magiſtrate ſhould alſo be adviſed,

viſed, that he ought to inquire into the truth by all the means that ſcrupulous anxiety can ſuggeſt. He ſhould know, that being called to decide on the life and honour of men, his underſtanding and his heart, ought to be enliſted, as it were, in the cauſe of humanity, and that there are no limits oppoſed to the extent of his duty: Then, without omitting any of the enquiries required by law, he would ſtrive to proceed ſtill further; and without rejecting any evidence capable of making an impreſſion on a reaſonable man, he would, at the ſame time, allow none to have ſuch deciſive force, as to render the examination of circumſtances unneceſſary. Judges would then make uſe of that inſtinctive mode of diſcernment, which is often more quick-ſighted and penetrating than any other. They would not then diſdain to read even the looks of the accuſer and accuſed; and they would not think it a matter of indifference to obſerve with attention, all thoſe emotions of nature, where truth is ſometimes painted with ſo much energy. Then, in ſhort, innocence, would be under the protection of ſomething as pure as itſelf, the ſcrupulous deciſion of a judge's conſcience.

Perhaps, we have never properly conſidered how much a preciſe methodical order, when too ſervilely followed, contracts the mind. It becomes then like a path traced between two banks, which prevents our diſcovering what is not

not in a ſtraight line. The ſtrict obſervance of method prevents us from conſulting that internal illumination, ſometimes ſo lively, of which the ſoul alone is the focus: For by ſubjecting us to a poſitive and regular procedure, and by making us delight in a determined path, which offers continual repoſe to our thoughts, it incapacitates us for exerciſing that delicate perception,—thoſe natural ſentiments, which have nothing fixed or circumſcribed, but whoſe unreſtrained efforts often make us approach to truth, as by a kind of inſtinctive inſpiration.

It would be deviating too far from the matter in hand, were I to extend theſe reflections further; and I haſten to connect them with the ſubject of this Chapter, by repeating again, That ſince the laws are inſufficient, even in the caſes ſubmitted to their authority, and ſince they have abſolute need of the aid of religious morality, whenever they impoſe on their expounders duties that are a little complicated, they would be ſtill leſs able to ſupply the habitual influence of that motive, the moſt powerful of all, whoſe action alone, is ſufficiently penetrating to follow us in the mazes of our conduct, and in the labyrinth of our thoughts.

I come now to mention other conſiderations. All that is required by public order, all that is of importance to ſociety, ſome will ſay is, that criminals may not eſcape from the ſword of juſtice;

juſtice; and that an attentive ſuperintendence may detect them, under whatever cover they ſeek to conceal themſelves. I will not here repeat the various obſtacles which are oppoſed to the plenitude of this vigilance; every one may eaſily form an idea of them: But I proceed to obſerve, That in conſidering the actual ſtate of Society, we ought not to forget that religious ſentiments have greatly diminiſhed the taſk of government. An entire new ſcene would open, had we only for our guide a political morality. It would not then be a few men without principles who would diſturb the public order; more able actors would mix in the throng. Some conducted by mature reflection, others hurried away by ſeducing appearances, would be inceſſantly at war with all thoſe whoſe fortune excited their jealouſy. Then indeed we ſhould diſcover the many and various opportunities there are of doing evil and injuring others. All theſe enemies of public order, being unmoleſted by the reproaches of conſcience, would daily become more expert in the art of eluding the purſuit of juſtice; and the dangers to which the imprudent expoſed themſelves would not diſcourage the more ſkilful.

It is then, if I may ſo ſpeak, becauſe the laws find men in a healthy conſtitution, and in a temperate ſtate, prepared by religious inſtruction, that they can reſtrain them. But were a ſyſtem

of

of education merely political, ever to prevail, new precautions, and new reſtraints would become indiſpenſably neceſſary. Thus we ſhould be looſed from the mild ties of religion, to have our civil ſlavery encreaſed, and our necks bent under the hardeſt of all yokes, that which is impoſed by our fellow creatures.

Religion, whoſe influence ſome wiſh us to reject, is better adapted than they imagine, to the ſtrange mixture of pride and weakneſs which conſtitutes our nature: And for us, ſuch as we are, its operation is far preferable to that of the penal laws. It is not before his equals, armed with the rod of vengeance, that the culprit is made to appear; neither is he abandoned to their ignorance, or inexorable juſtice; it is at the tribunal of his own conſcience that Religion accuſes him. She humbles him before God, the Sovereign of the world, and comforts him in the name of a tender and merciful Father. Alas! ye who wiſh to refer every thing to private intereſt and public puniſhment, How would you then deprive us both of our conſolation and of our true dignity? But permit me to liſten to thoſe commands which come from on high: Let me turn my attention from the menacing ſceptre which the potentates of the earth wield in their hand: Let me account to Him, who is greater than them all, and before whom they ſhrink to nothing. Let me, in ſhort, addreſs myſelf to Him

Him who pardons, and who, at the moment I have offended, permits me ſtill to love Him and rely on his forgiveneſs! Alas! without the idea of a God,—without this connection with a Supreme Being, the Author of Nature, we ſhould only liſten to the mean councils of ſelfiſh prudence; it would only be neceſſary to flatter and adore the rulers of nations, and all thoſe who, in an abſolute monarchy are the numerous repreſentatives of the authority of the prince. Yes, talents, ſentiments, all ought to bend before thoſe diſpenſers of ſo much good and evil, if nothing exiſts beyond the preſent life: And when once all cringe and fall proſtrate,—when there is no more dignity of character, men will become incapable of any great action, and unequal to any degree of moral excellence.

Religious opinions have the double merit of rendering us obedient to the laws preſcribed by the Sovereign, and of cheriſhing in our hearts ſecret ſentiments, which ſuſtain our courage, and remind us of our true dignity. Such ſentiments, by offering a proſpect of an ultimate period, when all muſt return to equality before the great Ruler of the World, teach men to ſhow ſubmiſſion without meanneſs, and to ſcorn an abject humiliation before their fellow mortals.

The idea of a God at the ſame diſtance from all men, ſerves alſo to conſole us for that painful ſenſe of ſuperiority of rank and fortune, which ſo

conſtantly oppreſſes us. We muſt tranſport ourſelves to thoſe heights which Religion diſcovers to us, in order to conſider with calmneſs and indifference the vain pretenſions of ſome, and the confident haughtineſs of others; and ſuch objects of regret or jealouſy as appeared a Coloſſus to our imagination, ſhrink to duſt, when we contraſt them with the grand proſpects which ſuch ſublime meditations open to our view.

How blind, then, how indifferent to their true intereſt, are thoſe who wiſh to ſubſtitute mere political and worldly maxims, inſtead of religious inſtructions! How obdurate and unfeeling are thoſe too, who imagine they ſhould be able to conduct men by terror alone; and who, conteſting the ſalutary influence of religious opinions, expect leſs from them, than from the ax of the lictors, and the apparatus of execution! What ſhall we then think of this wretched ſyſtem? For, if ſuch a method of ſecuring public tranquillity were even adequate to produce the effect, Why ſhould we not prefer religious principles, which *prevent* crimes, to the rigours of law which *puniſh* them? Neither do I underſtand, how thoſe who repel religious ſentiments, with the ſame hand wiſh to raiſe ſcaffolds every where, and multiply, without ſcruple, thoſe dreadful theatres of ſeverity: For if men, while hurried on to crimes, were only governed by blind neceſſity, alas! what do they deſerve?

And

And if we determine that they ſhould periſh as examples, we ſhould attend at their execution, as at an offering, like that of Iphigenia, who was ſacrificed at Aulis for the ſalvation of Greece.

Religion poſſeſſes ſtill another advantage over the laws. They are ever armed for vengeance; whilſt Religion, on the contrary, even when threatening, offers us pardon and felicity. And I believe, contrary to the common opinion, That man, by his nature, is more conſtantly animated by hope than reſtrained by fear. Hope compoſes the tenor of our life, whilſt fear is the effect of an extraordinary circumſtance or a particular ſituation. In ſhort, courage, or inconſiderateneſs, often makes us regardleſs of danger, whilſt ideas of happineſs are perpetually preſent, and are, as it were, blended with our whole exiſtence.

Some may, however, ſay, We mean not to ſpeak merely of the civil and penal laws, when we maintain that good public inſtitutions might be ſubſtituted for the influence of religious opinions: It would be neceſſary to introduce laws of education, which might previouſly prepare the mind and form the character. But they have not explained, nor can I conjecture, what theſe laws are, that they wiſh to diſtinguiſh from the general doctrines with which we are converſant. Theſe are undoubtedly ſuſceptible of

different degrees of perfection; however, before inſtructing us, not only in the ſimple and real virtues, but alſo in all thoſe that are complicated and conventional, ſuch doctrines neceſſarily become extremely vague, and cannot exiſt independent of the ſupport afforded them by the fixed and preciſe principles of Religion. The example of Sparta may perhaps be cited, where the ſtate undertook the education of the citizens, and by that means fitted them for thoſe extraordinary manners which hiſtory has depicted: But that government, aided by all the influence of paternal authority, had only two great objects in view, the encouragement of a martial ſpirit, and the preſervation of liberty. Little value was ſet on Morality, that ſyſtem which is now become ſo intereſting amongſt us. It was there rendered the leſs neceſſary, as all their inſtitutions tended to maintain a perfect equality of rank and fortune, and excluded every kind of communication with foreigners. In ſhort, it was, after all, a religious principle which ſubjected the Spartans to the authority of their legiſlator; and without their confidence in the Oracle of Delphos, Lycurgus had only been a celebrated Philoſopher.

Our preſent circumſtances are by no means ſuch as to admit of our being governed by laws of education, ſupported ſolely by political principles. In order to make the experiment, we muſt

muſt be divided into little ſocieties, and by ſome ſecret, yet undiſcovered, be enable to oppoſe invincible obſtacles to the enlargement of ſome and the deſtruction of others of theſe aſſociations: We muſt renounce all thoſe deſires and gratifications which are the inevitable conſequence of an increaſe of wealth, and the progreſs of the arts and ſciences. In ſhort, and the fact may appear ſomewhat ſtrange, at a period when, amidſt improvements of every kind, man is become a very compound moral being,—and when, in conſequence of this modification of the human character produced by our living in ſociety, there is more need than ever of ſome great principle which may reach the common ſpring of all the affections,—at this period, man is to be, all at once, reduced to his primitive ſimplicity! for, the influence of an education purely civil muſt otherwiſe be too narrow to produce any happy effects upon his character. It may be added, that as a political education could not be adapted to the people in general, we muſt, like the Spartans, divide them into two claſſes,—Citizens and Slaves. This obſervation leads us to an important reflection, That in a country where ſlavery was introduced, and where the moſt numerous claſs of the nation was governed by the conſtant fear of the ſevereſt chaſtiſement, one might truſt more to the bare influence of political morality: For this morality

having then only to regulate the claſs of ſociety which conſiſts of proprietors, the taſk would become far more limited: But among us, where fortunately all men, without diſtinction, are ſubjected only to the laws, ſuch extenſive regulations, neceſſarily require to be fortified and ſupported by an authority ſuch as that of religious opinions, which may affect every rank and character.

I ſhall conclude my obſervations on this part of my ſubject by another important reflection. Suppoſing even that the influence of ſovereign authority were ſufficiently extenſive to prevent or repreſs evil, ſtill Religion would have the advantage, in one reſpect: It alone inculcates the beneficent virtues; and in the preſent ſtate of ſociety, theſe virtues are indiſpenſably neceſſary. It is not enough to be ſtrictly juſt, while the laws of property reduce to bare neceſſaries the moſt numerous claſs of men, and their ſcanty reſources are dried up by the moſt trivial accident: I will venture to affirm, that ſuch is the extreme inequality eſtabliſhed by theſe laws, that the ſpirit of charity and benevolence conſtitutes an eſſential part of ſocial order. That ſpirit is ever ready to relieve diſtreſs, and, by a thouſand various ways, to communicate ſuccour and comfort to thoſe poor creatures who are ſinking under the extremity of wretchedneſs. But were this ſpirit, the buſineſs of which is to act

act as a mediator between the rigour of civil right and the original claims of humanity, ever to become extinct, we ſhould ſee all the ties of ſubordination gradually relax. Were the man favoured with the gifts of fortune never to appear to the people in the character of a benefactor, they would more ſenſibly feel the great extent of his privileges, and conſequently would become readier to queſtion his right of ſuperiority. A way muſt then be found of moderating the power of property, or otherwiſe we muſt pay due homage to that religious morality, which, by the ſublime idea of an exchange between the bleſſings of heaven and earth, obliges the rich to give what the laws cannot demand.

Thus, Religion continually comes to the aſſiſtance of civil legiſlation; it ſpeaks a language unknown to the laws; it excites that ſenſibility which ought to precede reaſon itſelf; it acts like light and natural heat,—it enlightens, animates and pervades all: And we ſhould carefully remark, that in ſociety theſe moral ſentiments are the imperceptible tie of many parts, which ſeem to be connected by their peculiar relations, but would be ſucceſſively detached, were this chain ever broken. This truth will be more fully illuſtrated in the following examination of the connection of opinion with morality.

WHEN it is propoſed to ſubject men to the obſervance of public order, and inſpire them with the love of virtue, by motives independent of Religion, thoſe who undertake the taſk will doubtleſs employ two very powerful principles: The deſire of Praiſe, and the fear of Shame. In order to follow my ſubject through all its branches, I muſt examine the different degrees of force theſe motives poſſeſs, and alſo how they can be applied. In another work, I have treated of Public Opinion, and its ſalutary effects; but my preſent ſubject obliges me to conſider it under a different point of view. This I ſhall be enabled to accompliſh, by placing myſelf, as it were, behind the ſcene of worldly affairs.

Firſt then, I remark, that the public opinion exerts its influence in a very narrow compaſs, being principally exerciſed on ſuch perſons as are rendered conſpicuous in the world by their rank or employment. The public opinion is an approbation or cenſure offered in name of the general intereſt: It can, therefore, be applied only to ſuch matters as one way or other affect this intereſt. The private conduct of thoſe who diſcharge the moſt important functions in ſociety, is, no doubt, ſubjected to the judgment and ſuperintendence of the public; and this is no way ſurpriſing, ſince, in ſuch circumſtances, the principles of an individual appear as an earneſt or preſage of his public virtues: But all thoſe, whoſe

whoſe ſole occupation is to receive and ſpend their income, and thoſe who are entirely devoted to diſſipation, and have no connection with the important concerns of the community, become independent of the opinion of the world; or at leaſt they do not experience its ſeverity, till, by fooliſh extravagance, or vain pretenſions, their conduct becomes the object of public ridicule. In ſhort, a great number of men, who, by their obſcurity and mediocrity of fortune, are, as it were, loſt in the crowd, will never dread a power that always ſelects its heroes and victims from thoſe who are above the common rank. Thus, the ſolitary inhabitants of cottages, diſperſed through the country, are as indifferent to public opinion, as thoſe unhappy tribes, who labour at the bottom of mines, and paſs their whole lives in a dark ſubterraneous cavern, are to the rays of the ſun.

We can then form no compariſon between the peculiar aſcendency of public opinion and the general influence of religious morality.

Fame can only reward certain rare and ſingular actions; and, amongſt a nation of heroes, or men in the ſtate of perfection, it would have nothing to beſtow. Religion has a continual tendency to render virtue common; but the univerſal ſucceſs of its inſtructions would derogate nothing from the value of its benefits.

Thoſe

Thoſe alone, who appear with ſplendour on the ſtage of life, can obtain the laurels which fame beſtows. Religion, on the contrary, heaps its moſt diſtinguiſhed favours on thoſe who deſpiſe praiſe, and do good in ſecret.

The opinion of the world always requires that talents and knowledge ſhould accompany virtue; and thus the love of praiſe becomes the ſource and motive of great actions. Religion impoſes no ſuch condition: Its rewards are offered to the ignorant as well as the learned, to the humble ſpirit as well as to the exalted genius. By animating all men equally, and exciting univerſal activity, it contributes effectually to the maintenance of civil order.

Fame, judging only of actions in their ſtate of maturity, makes no account of our endeavours; and as the competitors behold not the palm, till the moment they approach the goal, every one muſt, at the commencement of the career, derive his courage and perſeverance from his own ſtrength alone. Religion, on the contrary, attends us, if I may ſo ſpeak, from the moment we begin to think. She favourably receives our intentions, and accepts our mere willingneſs; ſhe ſtrengthens our reſolutions and encourages our endeavours: And continually reminding us of proferred rewards, ſhe influences us at all times and in all ſituations.

As

As fame can only confer rewards, of which the principal value depends on compariſons, contraſts and competitions, it frequently draws on its favourites the envenomed breath of ſlander; and then they have ſometimes cauſe to doubt of the real value of its favours. Religion mingles no mortifications with its rewards. It affords happineſs and contentment in obſcurity; and as it has ſufficient treaſures for all the world, what is granted to ſome never impoveriſhes others.

The public opinion is ſometimes miſtaken in its determinations; becauſe amidſt the vaſt circle in which its tribunal is erected, it is often difficult to diſtinguiſh true merit and the ſplendour which follows it, from the falſe glare of hypocriſy. Religion extends its influence to the inmoſt receſſes of the heart, and places there an obſerver, who has a cloſer view of men than their actions afford, and whom they cannot either deceive or ſurpriſe.

It muſt be confeſſed, that there are moments in which public opinion loſes its influence, and becomes enervated, or is guided by a ſervile ſpirit: When it ſeeks to find faults in the oppreſſed, and attributes noble intentions to powerful men, that it may without ſhame abandon the one and celebrate the other: Ah! in ſuch moments, with what delight do we return to the precepts of religious morality! Thoſe independent principles, which, while they decide our opinions with regard

regard to things deſerving approbation or contempt, enable us to follow the dictates of our heart, and ſpeak according to our conſcience!

Thus, the opinion of the world, whoſe increaſing influence I have beheld, though it unites ſo many motives to excite men to illuſtrious actions and exalted virtues, can never be compared with the univerſal, invariable influence of Religion, and thoſe moral ſentiments with which it inſpires men of all ages, of all conditions, and of every degree of underſtanding.

Would it be deviating from my ſubject, to notice the illuſion thoſe are under, who expect ſome important advantage to reſult from the marks of diſtinction lately invented in France, under the name of Public rewards for virtue? Theſe trivial favours of opinion can only be beſtowed on a few ſingular actions; and it might be feared, that were theſe inſtitutions rendered permanent and general, they might turn the attention of the people from that grand recompenſe which ought to be the chief motive and ſpring of all that is great and virtuous. Experienced huntſmen, at the moment when all the hounds are purſuing the nobleſt inhabitant of the foreſt, would never permit the pack to turn aſide and follow any prey that may ſtart from a thicket.

The eſtabliſhments here alluded to, have alſo the diſadvantage of ſuggeſting a degree of ſurpriſe

priſe at the appearance of good actions; and thus, announcing too diſtinctly that they are thought rare, and above the ordinary powers of humanity. And were theſe inſtitutions extended ſtill farther, they would produce a mere ſpirit of parade, always ready to languiſh when applauſe was diſtant. It would indeed be a great misfortune, were ſuch a ſpirit ever to take place of ſimple and modeſt integrity, which contains in itſelf its motives and reward. Virtue and vanity form but a bad alliance. In that caſe, men act only to be ſeen; and of the few opportunities they have of doing good, they always ſelect the moſt conſpicuous. There is, beſides, a claſs of men, ſo ill treated by fortune, that it would be a great miſtake to habituate them to expect rewards in this life for fulfilling their duty; as ſuch expectations would be too often fruſtrated.

We cannot too frequently repeat, that a reſpect for morality muſt be maintained, by ſtrengthening religious principles, which are its moſt ſolid foundation. All other extraneous motives derive their force from novelty; and before the period when ſociety would actually need to have recourſe to them, it would perhaps have arrived at the higheſt pitch of depravity.

I HAVE hitherto only conſidered the influence of opinion as it is diſcovered in a general and public

public manner. But men alſo privately manifeſt the idea they have conceived of each other as individuals. This ſentiment, which takes then the ſimple name of *eſteem*, depends on our certain knowledge of the moral character of thoſe with whom we have an intimate correſpondence. Eſteem, in this view, has not the ſplendour of reputation; but as every one can pretend to it in the circle where his birth and occupation have placed him, the hope of obtaining it ought to be reckoned among the principal motives which excite us to the obſervance of morality. However, were we to ſuppoſe this eſteem to be entirely ſeparated from religious ſentiments, it would become like many other advantages, which every one prizes according to his own fancy; for whatever is derived ſolely from men, can only have a value relative to our connection with them: Thus, though the regard of one, or of ſeveral perſons, would ſometimes compenſate the loſs of public approbation, yet even their eſteem would often appear inferior to other objects of ambition. In ſhort, from the moment every preference, every valuation was brought to a ſtandard, each individual would inſenſibly adopt a particular book of rates; and the accuracy of the appretiation would depend on his judgment and foreſight. But can we imagine, that moral order would be ſecured, while morality depended on nice and arbitrary compariſons, whoſe foundations are continually

continually changing by the various circumſtances and ſituations of life? The motives which Religion preſents are of a very different kind. It is neither by confuſed contraſts, nor intricate calculations, that it directs men. It recals their attention to their chief intereſt, and aſſembles them, as it were, around a beacon whoſe brilliant flames are ſeen on all ſides. Indeed the rules which it preſcribes are neither uncertain nor wavering, and the advantages which it promiſes admit of no equivalent.

It may be further obſerved, that a ſelfiſh ſpirit, after comparing the enjoyment of eſteem with pleaſures of a different kind, would not fail to reckon the chances which afford a hope of impoſing on men; and amidſt theſe perplexed calculations, the paſſion of the moment would be almoſt always victorious. Beſides, we might aſk, What is the eſteem of others to that numerous claſs which poverty ſecludes from ſociety? What effects can it produce on thoſe who ſubſiſt ſo precariouſly, that they can never extend their views beyond to-day or to-morrow? The advantages annexed to reputation may be conſidered as ſo many promiſſory notes, which do not become really due till ſome diſtant term, for which the creditor muſt wait with patience: Knowledge and reflection are neceſſary to make us ſenſible of their value; and the greater part of a nation will always be ſo inconſiderate and ignorant,

ignorant, as to be incapable of entering into the proper train of reflection.

If from the lower claſs of people, we turn our attention to thoſe of ſuperior rank, there occurs a remark of a different kind: That in a country where we have the hope of obtaining the moſt ſplendid marks of diſtinction, and where fame has power to raiſe heroes, great miniſters, and men of genius in every profeſſion, we do not find that the duties of private life are beſt known and moſt reſpected. Mankind, while uniting to celebrate with ardour great talents and actions, conſider with indifference the morals and manners of individuals. They form in their own imagination an ideal excellence, conſiſting of whatever can contribute to the celebrity of their country, the honour of their nation, and the political power of their prince. By habituating themſelves to connect every conſideration with theſe intereſts, they become extremely negligent of ordinary virtues, and ſometimes even conclude that ſuperior abilities of mind may abſolutely diſpenſe with them. Beſides, if reputation ſhall be conſidered as a ſuitable reward for the moſt aſſiduous labour and painful ſelf-denial, we can never imagine that moderate eſteem ſhould ſufficiently indemnify thoſe who obtain it, for the ſacrifice of their paſſions: Neither does it follow, that this ſentiment ſhould give them ſtrength to reſiſt the numerous ſeduc-

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tions that ambitious hopes and the chances of fortune diſcloſe to their view. This conſideration acquires ſtill more force in a kingdom, where the favour of the prince is the origin of all diſtinctions, and where ſome of theſe are ſo great, as to become equivalent to reputation itſelf.

To expreſs the matter in a general and comprehenſive manner; I ſay, That the eſteem of men, even when that ſentiment ſeems moſt foreign to Religion, receives, nevertheleſs, from Religion its principal ſtrength, and even originates from it. This reflection is of great importance, and I will therefore endeavour to demonſtrate its truth.

Let us begin with conſidering the original principles which, by the aſſent of mankind, have conferred a value on the various expreſſions of the ſentiment of eſteem. Theſe principles we ſhall undoubtedly find to be, a diſtinct idea of the duties of men, with a general and well eſtabliſhed notion of good morals. But neither of theſe conditions can be obtained without the aſſiſtance of Religion; ſince the connection between private and public intereſt, the only foundation of a morality which depends entirely on ourſelves, is, as has been demonſtrated, an imperfect ſyſtem, and ſuſceptible of many arbitrary interpretations. It is neceſſary, then, that our ſocial obligations ſhould be fixed in an authentic manner, if we wiſh our judgment and ſentiments

to be truly expreſſive of the relation which ought to ſubſiſt between our conduct and moral perfection. Were this moral perfection only determined by human conventions,—were it deſpoiled of the majeſty with which Religion inveſts it, reputation and ſentiments of eſteem, which are the pledge and ſtamp of good morals, would gradually loſe their value; like coin, which cannot preſerve its current worth in commerce, after having been materially altered in its weight and ſtandard. But how could we alter the eſſence of morality more, and derogate more from the reſpect which is due to it, than by ſeparating it from the ſublime motives which Religion preſents, to unite it to merely political conſiderations?

One objection I ought to obviate. It may perhaps be ſaid, that the influence of honour in the army ſeems to be a proof, that reputation, without the aid of any other impulſe, would have ſufficient influence to direct the mind to the end propoſed. This objection does not appear to have much force. Honour preſerves a great aſcendency in armies; becauſe among men thus aſſembled, it is impoſſible to eſcape ſhame, and the puniſhment incurred by cowardice. In war, the power of authority and that of fame exert their united force, becauſe they influence a ſet of men engaged in one undertaking, and actuated by the ſame ſpirit, by means of that ſingular ſubordination, termed *diſcipline*. Thus, in

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the firſt ages of the Roman republic, while the army participated more of the air of the City, and was not yet familiarized to the military yoke; it was only through the ſanction of an oath, ſupported by ſentiments of Religion, that the general was able to prevent the inconſtancy and defection of thoſe who followed him to the camp. Whatever then, at preſent, the power of honour may be in armies, whatever influence it may have in the field of battle, where the actors, ſpectators and judges are aſſembled, and need only to practiſe, remark and praiſe one particular virtue, we can draw no deduction from it, applicable to the ſocial relations, which are of immenſe extent and diverſity. Beſides, military honour is very far from being averſe to the general principles of morality, or to thoſe religious opinions which are their moſt ſolid ſupport. For ſentiments which depend, in any reſpect, on the idea of making a noble ſacrifice, would loſe great part of their force, if the univerſal baſis of our duty were ever ſhaken.

A perfect model is neceſſary to fix the admiration of mankind; and many opinions which may, at firſt, ſeem purely conventional, owe their reality to a connection with ſuch an original model.

An opinion, however, purely ſocial, and very powerful, has reſulted from our martial cuſtoms,—I mean the Point of Honour, when we conſider

it in its very ſingular acceptation, where a man is ready to ſacrifice his life to guard himſelf from the ſlighteſt humiliation. The rules dictated by this opinion, indeed, can only be applied amongſt equals, and can extend their authority no farther than to that inconſiderable part of a nation which conſiſts of thoſe who are wholly devoted to the habits of ſociety, and entirely occupied with compariſons and diſtinctions. It is one of the ancient appendages of military honour, and by directing all its force towards a ſingle point, it is become a ſimple principle, which has been blindly tranſmitted, and as blindly reſpected. By the effect of a ſimilar habit, ſavages think it their higheſt glory to contemn bodily pain, and to demonſtrate a degree of gaiety amidſt the moſt excruciating tortures. Can we doubt that their ſupernatural exultations would be weakened, the moment they were made acquainted with our moſt common ideas? Our Point of Honour, too, which, in its exaggerated ſtate, reſembles their death ſongs, could not reſiſt metaphyſical arguments, if ever metaphyſics became our ſole guide in morality; for after having enquired into the motives of our moſt important obligations, we would naturally analyſe this ſubtile ſentiment which makes us regardleſs of danger. Yes, if reſpect for Religion were abſolutely deſtroyed,—if this ſimple opinion, which carries with it ſo many obligations, and defends ſo many duties, had no

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other ſupport, the idea of honour would ſoon be weakened; and our perſonal intereſt being gradually diſengaged from all reſtraint of the imagination, would aſſume a character ſo fierce and reſolute, that our habitual impreſſions, and our relations to others, would be abſolutely changed.

Permit me to add another reflection: It will always be eaſy to ſubject men to a governing opinion, when they themſelves, and thoſe who govern them, unite all their efforts to attain the ſame end. But if this governing opinion be not, like Religion, the general principle of our conduct,—if it cannot direct us in the different ſituations of life, it would, in moſt inſtances, miſlead us; or, at beſt, its utility would be only partial and momentary. If, with a deſign to remedy this inconvenience, we endeavoured to multiply theſe opinions, they would weaken each other. For, in order powerfully to intereſt the imagination, it is neceſſary that one idea, one authority, and one important object engage the attention. Our ſucceſs, in this reſpect, depends on the choice of a ſingle principle, whoſe influence extends to all; and ſuch is the peculiar merit of *Religious Opinions*. In the name, therefore, of Reaſon, of ſound Policy and Philoſophy, Religious Sentiments demand our moſt ſerious reſpect,

I reſume my ſubject by repeating, That eſteem or contempt, honour or ſhame, are ſo far from being ſufficient to ſupply the place of the active influence of Religion, that the public opinion itſelf is confirmed, and in a great meaſure guided, by Religious Sentiments. We would ſoon give way to ſubtile reaſonings on the reſpect due to the eſteem of the world, were not the language by which that is expreſſed, united in our minds with ſomething more venerable than the judgment of mankind,—were we not early impreſſed with a ſacred reſpect for virtue, by a religious education. Soon would we experience, that mere worldly conſiderations, inſtead of affording the happieſt baſis for virtue and order, confound all order, and deſtroy every moral diſtinction. After depriving morality of its principal ſupport, in vain ſhould we attempt to prop it up by a ſcaffolding of laws, or by the force of opinion, without any guide to direct its exertions.—Diſguiſe and diſſimulation would be inſtantly formed into a ſyſtem, the ſtudy of which would be indiſpenſably neceſſary; They would even become a fair and lawful defence,—and would elude the moſt unwearied attention, the moſt acute penetration. Expreſſions of approbation would then be viewed in no other light than as arts ingeniouſly contrived to prompt the inconſiderate to acts of imprudent diſintereſtedneſs: The praiſe beſtowed on generous actions would thus,

thus, by degrees, loſe its value in the eyes both of thoſe who conferred and of thoſe who received it, and might at length become the object of deriſion,—an ironical expreſſion of contempt.

But religious principles eſtabliſh order, and maintain every thing in its proper place. They are, in the moral ſyſtem, if we may be allowed the compariſon, equivalent to that myſterious force which, acting uniformly through the whole frame of nature, retains the planets in their orbits, and directs their revolutions; yet, while it thus maintains the general order of the material world, eludes the moſt careful obſervation of men, ſo that they can ſcarce infer its exiſtence from its effects.

CHAP. III.

Objection drawn from our Natural Diſpoſition to Goodneſs.

SOME perſons are of opinion, that man has received from nature a ſecret propenſity towards all that is juſt and good and virtuous. In conſequence of this happy inclination, the taſk of the moraliſt is confined to prevent the alteration of our original conſtitution: An eaſy taſk, ſay they, which may be accompliſhed without any extraordinary effort, and without having recourſe to religious principles.

It is firſt to be obſerved, that the exiſtence of this excellent innate goodneſs has long been a ſubject of diſpute, as every aſſertion muſt be, of which we cannot demonſtrate the truth, either by *a priori* reaſoning, or by appeals to experience. It is impoſſible for us to determine what are the natural diſpoſitions of mankind; for we have no proper opportunities of obſerving them, but as they are improved, or modelled by education and habit. One or two inſtances have been adduced,

duced, of children who have arrived at maturity in a foreſt: But we know not at what preciſe age they were left in that ſolitary ſtate, or what might have been their diſpoſitions, if, when brought back to ſociety, they had not been guided by inſtruction, or reſtrained by fear: It is not very probable, that man has derived from his original nature all the diſpoſitions which lead to goodneſs. It is equally inconſiſtent with his pride and the dignity of his nature, to entertain ſuch an idea: The extent and power of his intellectual faculties, together with his capacity of gradual improvement, plainly ſhew, that he is to act his part under the direction of reaſon; and that he is no leſs diſtinguiſhed from the inferior animals, that are ſubjected to a blind and uniform inſtinct, by the high deſtiny for which he is formed, than by the capacities with which he is endowed.

Reaſon, however, our faithful guide, would be incapable of ſubjecting us to the laws of order, juſtice and beneficence, were it not ſeconded by a nature proper to receive every noble impreſſion and ſentiment: But this reflection, far from favouring any ſyſtem of independence or impiety, receives its chief force from religious principles. What then is here the natural train of thought? We firſt attribute to a Supreme and Univerſal Being, all the perfections which ſeem

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to conſtitute his eſſence. From this principle we are led to preſume, that we, his intelligent creatures, his nobleſt work, participate, in ſome meaſure, of that Divine Spirit, of which we are an emanation. But, were we ever to imagine our confidence in the exiſtence of a God, to be a deceitful illuſion, How could we believe that the fortuitous offspring of blind and unguided nature ſhould be more diſpoſed to good than to evil? We muſt therefore derive our opinion of innate goodneſs, from a ſecret ſentiment, and from a complete conviction of the exiſtence of an over-ruling Power, the firſt model of all perfection. Since we equally obtain from that Power, thoſe faculties which enable us to acquire knowledge, to improve by experience, to extend our views into futurity, and to elevate our thoughts to God, it often happens that we cannot well diſtinguiſh the exertions of ability and virtue, from thoſe efforts which depend merely on original inſtinct; and indeed, it would not at all contribute to our advantage to make that diſtinction.

We perceive clearly, that there is a correſpondence and a harmony among all the parts of our moral nature; and therefore we can neither deny the exiſtence of our natural inclination towards goodneſs, nor conſider that inclination as a diſpoſition which needs not the aid of

religious

religious principles to ſtrengthen it, and render it a ſuitable guide to conduct us through the painful journey of life. The production of wholeſome fruits requires, primarily, a favourable ſoil: This advantage, however, would be uſeleſs without ſeed, and the labour of the huſbandman, together with the fertilizing warmth of the ſun. The Author of Nature has thought fit, that a great number of cauſes ſhould continually concur to renovate the productions of the earth; and the ſame intention and plan ſeem to have determined the principle and developement of all the faculties of the mind. In order to diſpoſe intelligent beings to the love of virtue and reſpect for morality, there ſhould concur, not only happy natural diſpoſitions, but alſo a judicious, education, good laws, and, above all, a habitual intercourſe with the Supreme Being, from which alone can ariſe firm reſolutions, and every animating thought. But men, ambitious of comprehending an infinite diverſity of relations within the limits of their weak capacity, wiſh to confine them to a few cauſes. The truth of this obſervation is every where diſcoverable; thus many wiſh to attribute every thing to education, whilſt others, actuated by a ſimilar motive, pretend, that our natural diſpoſitions are the only ſource of our actions and intentions, of our vices and virtues. Perhaps, indeed, there

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may be but one primary ſpring in the univerſe, one prolific principle, which may be the ſource of all; but, as it is at the origin of this principle, and not in its innumerable developements, that its unity can be perceived, the firſt great Diſpoſer of Nature can alone be in poſſeſſion of the ſecret. In ſhort, ſince we can diſcover, of the immenſe mechaniſm of the world, only a few wheels, we become almoſt ridiculous, while we make choice ſometimes of one and ſometimes of another, to which we refer excluſively, the cauſe of the movement and action of the ſimpleſt parts of the natural and moral world.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Objections drawn from the Good Conduct of many irreligious Men.

IT may perhaps be thought, after reading the preceding chapter, that I have taken little room to treat a queſtion on which ſo much has been written: But if it be allowed that I have approached pretty near to the truth, I ſhall need no other excuſe. Reſearches after truth, reſemble circles traced one around the other; that which is furtheſt from the centre has neceſſarily the greateſt extent.

I will then endeavour, with the ſame brevity, to examine the objection which is to be the ſubject of this chapter.

Society, it is ſaid, is at preſent filled with perſons, who, to adopt the faſhionable expreſſion, are *abſolutely diveſted of every prejudice*, who believe not even the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, and yet their conduct appears as regular as that of the moſt religious men.

Before replying to this objection, I muſt make one important remark. The detracters of religion

gion conſtantly confound devotion and piety. They alſo underſtand devotion in an extravagant ſenſe, which it does not naturally bear, and thus gain the advantage, by ſetting out on falſe grounds. So delicate are the ſentiments, and ſo ſimple the external expreſſions of true piety, that they generally eſcape the obſervation of men of the world: Few of thoſe who ſpeak of it would be able to deſcribe it faithfully. Devotion is uſually repreſented as conſiſting chiefly in appearances, as delighting in a pompous diſplay of auſtere obſervances, and often ſo much ſoured by the ſeverities and reſtraints to which ſhe ſubmits, as to contract a harſh and gloomy ſpirit, inconſiſtent with whatever is mild, amiable, or indulgent: In ſhort, devotion is ſometimes blended with hypocriſy, and then it becomes a deſpicable aſſemblage of the moſt contemptible vices. We need only to glance on theſe two different portraits, and we muſt, at once, ſee that the ſentiments of piety which true Religion inſpires, are of a rational and elevated nature. We muſt then compare morality, inſpired by this gentle ſpirit, with the morals of thoſe men who are guided only by ſuch principles as they frame to themſelves. The one of theſe ſurely affords a much firmer baſis to morality than the other; but we might deceive ourſelves, were we not to extend our views beyond the narrow circle known amongſt us by the name of

ſociety.

ſociety. In thoſe narrow and ſlight connections, which men form by the intercourſe of idleneſs, and by joining in the ſame frivolous amuſements, no qualities are mutually required, but ſuch as are ſuitable to the circumſtances of that intercourſe. The code of laws, by which theſe connections are regulated, is very brief: Integrity in the tranſactions of life; conſtancy in friendſhip,—or at leaſt a certain conſiſtency of conduct, with a kind of dignity in manners and converſation,—and in ſhort, general probity, are all that is neceſſary to form a reſpectable character in the eye of the world. Compacts are ſometimes formed to maintain the higher virtues; but what ſeems to be generally preferred, is a grant of indulgence in favour of certain vices, which do not derange the order, or diſturb men in the quiet enjoyment of their pleaſures, and which render none unhappy, but parents, huſbands, creditors, vaſſals, and the loweſt claſs of the people. Far diſtant, indeed, from ſuch a toleration, are thoſe ſocial obligations which religious morality dictates, and of which I made a ſhort ſketch, when I contraſted them with thoſe which are impoſed by civil laws. Thus, until we have reviewed the whole ſyſtem of our duties, and compared them with the leſs rigid conventions of faſhionable ſociety, we cannot be able to judge how far the conduct of perſons diſengaged from every religious tie,

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ought to be given as an example, and how far their morality may be ſufficient for all the circumſtances of life.

But even admitting, for a moment, this ſuppoſition, we can infer nothing contrary to the principles I have endeavoured to eſtabliſh: For all thoſe who free themſelves, at a certain age, from the yoke of Religion, have been, at leaſt, prepared by it to reſpect virtue. Opinions inculcated during infancy, have a great influence on the human heart, even long after our underſtanding has rejected the reaſoning on which they were founded. The ſoul, early formed to the love of order, and ſuſtained in the ſame diſpoſition by the power of habit, can never be entirely diveſted of this principle. So that, whatever opinions are adopted at the period when the judgment is formed, they continue, in a gradual and imperceptible manner, to influence the character and direct the conduct. Beſides, whilſt a high reſpect for morality is maintained by Religion, amongſt the more numerous part of mankind, thoſe who reject ſuch ſentiments, muſt perceive that probity leads to eſteem, and to the various advantages which depend on it. Thus a virtuous Atheiſt merely reminds us, that he lives where virtue is reſpected: His conduct does not demonſtrate the inutility of religious principles; but, on the contrary, it points out their indirect influence. Methinks I here ſee, in a beautiful

beautiful piece of mechaniſm, a part detached from its hold, which however maintains its place, by the ſtill ſubſiſting force of a general equilibrium.

What! Would you then have need of Religion to be an honeſt man? With this queſtion, the oppoſers of Religion hope to embarraſs thoſe who wiſh to preſerve to morality its beſt ſupport. The deſire of giving an honourable idea of their ſentiments induces ſome readily to reply, That they certainly ſhould not need the check of Religion, and that the dictates of their heart would be always ſufficient to direct them. This anſwer is, no doubt, reſpectable; but for my part, I confeſs, that I ſhould merely ſay, that virtue, when become habitual, has ſo many charms, that a truly ſenſible man would continue to be juſt, though every religious ſentiment were annihilated: Yet it is uncertain whether, with a political education, his principles might have been the ſame. I ſhall add, that were he to fall into a ſtate of miſery and dejection, which might make him envy the happineſs of others, we could not be certain that he would have ſufficient ſtrength to reſiſt ſuch a revolution of ſentiments. There are ſome queſtions, of which a juſt judgment can be formed, only in certain ſituations. Thus all who enjoy the favours of fortune, have, in conſequence of their condition, fewer objects of envy,

and are therefore leſs ſubject to temptations; and amidſt the various comforts which ſurround them, they can at leiſure, contemplate the principles of others.

Were we to ſearch among philoſophical writers for the chief abettors of thoſe new doctrines, and were their moral conduct cited as an example, we could not avoid obſerving, That a retired life, love of ſtudy, and a conſtant habit of reflection, muſt naturally diffuſe a ſerenity all over their ſentiments; beſides, their thoughts being pre-occupied by abſtract and general ideas, they can never experience the paſſions, and can ſeldom be perſonally engaged in thoſe ardent purſuits which actuate ſociety. We cannot then determine with certainty, with what degree of firmneſs they would reſiſt temptation, if, without any other defenſive arms than their principles, and no guide but convenience, they had to combat againſt the allurements of fortune and ambition, which continually preſent themſelves in the courſe of worldly affairs. They have alſo, like all inventors and propagators of new ſyſtems, a degree of vanity which prompts them to multiply the number of their diſciples. But how could they have promiſed themſelves any ſucceſs, if, after attacking the moſt reſpectable opinions, they had not endeavoured to prove, that their doctrines were not in oppoſition to morality?

morality? Beſides, after having ſilently ſapped the foundation of our dwelling, it is very neceſſary, that they ſhould ſupport the edifice for ſome time,—were it only while they have with us a common habitation, and during the interval in which we can judge of the utility of their inſtructions: In ſhort, being the dupes of their own hearts, they frequently imagine, becauſe they are, at the ſame time, irreligious by ſyſtem, and juſt by character and habit, that Religion and virtue have no neceſſary union: And ſince, in the principal concerns of life, the ſlighteſt doubt has ſome influence on our actions. Is it not poſſible, even whilſt they endeavour to overthrow religious principles, and ridicule them in converſation, that they may ſtill ſeek to preſerve a ſecret connection with them, by the propriety of their conduct? Thus, in the diſputes of princes, and in the quarrels of miniſters, the members of the ſame family ſometimes artfully divide themſelves, in order, at all events, that one of their friends may be in each party.

Theſe different reflections muſt certainly be taken into conſideration, before we can admit the inferences that might be drawn from the manners of irreligious men. But, to diſcredit ſuch arguments entirely, it is ſufficient to obſerve, that they are totally inapplicable to the moſt numerous claſs of men. Honeſt Atheiſts have never

exiſted among the commonalty: Religion comprehends all their knowledge in morality; and if once they were to loſe this guide, their conduct would be abſolutely dependent on chance and circumſtances.

It is alſo important to obſerve, That, according to the motives which relax the moral principles, there are great differences among the various characters which attend vicious actions: A depraved man, if poſſeſſed of latent ſentiments of Religion, will do wrong through weakneſs, and according to the ſucceſſive tranſports of his paſſions; but the wicked Atheiſt has no fixed time of committing crimes; neither can he be ſaid to be ſeduced by opportunities, for he ſearches for them, and watches them with impatience: He yields not through the contagion of imitation, but takes pleaſure in ſetting an example: He is not a corrupt fruit,—he is himſelf the tree evil.

Another objection has been offered, but of a quite different kind. The oppoſers of Religion point out the contraſt, frequently obſerved between the conduct and religious opinions of the greater part of men. From this oppoſition, they would conclude that theſe principles are not a certain ſafeguard. They add, in ſupport of their argument, that, after examining the belief of thoſe, who have terminated their licentious

lives

lives by an ignominious death, we perceive that the greater number conſiſts of perſons blindly ſubjected to ſuch religious opinions.

Theſe opinions, no doubt, cannot at all times completely repreſs the various ſallies of our paſſions; but it is ſufficient, that they form the moſt effectual reſtraints. There have always been, and there will be, vicious and corrupt men in every ſociety, even where religious principles have the greateſt influence; for they act not like a mechanical force, by weights, levers and ſprings, of which we can exactly calculate the power: Neither are they abſolutely modifications of our nature; but they enlighten, guide and animate us, according to our diſpoſitions and ſenſibility, and according to the degree of our own exertion in the numerous conflicts which we have to ſuſtain. It would then be evident treachery, to attack Religion, by depicting the vices and crimes from which it has not been able to guard ſociety, inſtead of fixing our attention on all the diſorders which it checks or prevents.

It would be equally wrong to repreſent the general languor of Religion, as a proof that it has, at preſent, very little influence on morality. We ought rather to remark, how great that power muſt have been, which, even in the decline of its force, is ſtill ſufficient to contribute

ſo much to the maintenance of public order, We may juſtly exclaim, How valuable muſt the whole be, ſince we receive ſo great an advantage from a part!

The inferences attempted to be drawn from the opinions and faith of wretches ſinking under the ſword of juſtice; is a mere abuſe of reaſoning. Since men who profeſs Religion, form the major part of the populace in every country, we muſt, among them, neceſſarily meet the greater number of malefactors; in the ſame manner that we are ſure to find, in this claſs, the greateſt number of men of a particular age, ſtature or complexion. If ſuch an argument were admiſſible, to cenſure a religious education, the ſalubrity of breaſt milk, might, with the ſame reaſon, be conteſted, by alleging, that many ſick and dying perſons have received this nouriſhment. No common circumſtance, though even a univerſal condition, ought to be confounded with a general cauſe: Theſe two ideas are abſolutely diſtinct.

There are other objections which equally merit a diſcuſſion; but theſe I ſhall place in their order, after the chapter where I propoſe to examine, under different heads, the influence of religious opinions on our happineſs. It has been already ſeen, and it will be more clearly perceived in the progreſs of this work, that I do not endea-

vour to elude difficulties: For, before I determined to defend, according to my abilities, a cauſe which I earneſtly wiſh to render dear to mankind, I carefully ſtudied the means: And after having fortified myſelf againſt the ſyſtems oppoſite to my ſentiments, I can, with ſome confidence, diſcloſe the motives which ſerve to ſupport them.

CHAP. V.

The influence of Religious Principles on our Happineſs.

HAVING demonſtrated the cloſe connection of morality with religious opinions, we have already pointed out one of the principal relations of theſe opinions with the public happineſs; ſince the repoſe and interior tranquillity of ſociety, eſſentially depend on the maintenance of civil order, and the exact obſervance of the laws of juſtice. But the greater part of the happineſs of which we are ſuſceptible, ariſes not from our intercourſe with the community. The benefits of Religion would then be very imperfect, were they not extended to our moſt intimate ſentiments, and were they unavailing in thoſe ſecret conflicts of different affections which often agitate our ſouls, and diſtract our thoughts. Religious principles are far from deſerving ſuch a reproach. What raiſes them above every other doctrine and legiſlation, is, That they equally influence the happineſs of individuals and of ſociety. In order to examine this truth ſomewhat in a philoſophical manner, we muſt, for a little, contemplate our moral nature, and attentively examine the

the origin of the enjoyments and the anxieties of our minds.

Men, at their firſt entrance into the world, and as ſoon as their intellectual faculties are diſcloſed, extend their views, and live in the future. Senſual pleaſures and bodily pain only can detain them in the preſent; but in the long intervals between the ſuſpenſion and recurrence of ſuch ſenſations, it is by anticipation and memory that they are happy or miſerable; and remembrance itſelf is only intereſting, in proportion as it keeps up the connection between the paſt and the future. The influence of the future on all our moral affections, no doubt, often eſcapes our notice. Let us illuſtrate this by ſome examples: We fancy that the preſent moment alone produces happineſs, while we receive praiſe, obtain ſome mark of diſtinction, or are informed of an unexpected increaſe of our fortune; and when, either in converſation, or in our cloſet, we are pleaſed with a happy flight of imagination, or ſome diſcovery of reaſon. Theſe, with a number of ſimilar enjoyments, we call *preſent happineſs*, though they all derive their real value entirely from our connecting them in our minds with the proſpect of futurity. Indeed, reſpect, applauſe, thoſe triumphs of ſelf-love, thoſe harbingers of fame, and even fame itſelf, are acquiſitions which education and habit have rendered precious, by exhibiting

hibiting beyond them ſome other advantage, of which they are only the ſymbols. Often, indeed, the laſt object of our ambition, is but an enjoyment of opinion, the obſcure image of ſome more real poſſeſſion. We every where ſee the human imagination occupied with a ſucceſſion of deluſive hopes: Future good is always either the immediate object of our thoughts and wiſhes, or perhaps, without our obſerving it, the reaſon why we value preſent enjoyments. Thus, either indirectly, and in a way in which it eſcapes our notice, or directly, and with our knowledge, all our enjoyments and objects of purſuit are placed in diſtant perſpective;—and, thus, though conſtantly impoſed upon, yet we are never undeceived. Enſlaved by habit, it would be vain for us to attempt to ſeparate the real advantages depending on opinion, from thoſe deluſive hopes with which they are connected, and by which we have been ſeduced and deceived, through the whole courſe of life.

There are few parts of the moral ſyſtem, which agree not with this manner of explaining the chief cauſe of our pleaſures and pains. I am very far, however, from thinking that the ſentiments which unite men by the charm of friendſhip, and ſo eſſentially contribute to their happineſs, depend on the ſame principles. Every thing is real in the ſocial affections, ſince they conſiſt

ſiſt only in the ſimple aſſociation of ourſelves with others; and, in this view, they may be conſidered as, in ſome meaſure, enlarging our own exiſtence; but this intimate participation of the good and evil of life does not change the eſſence of theſe affections. Friendſhip doubles our enjoyments and our comforts; and, the cloſe alliance of two ſympathizing ſouls, fortifies both againſt every event: But ſince we muſt always remain ſubjected to the ſame paſſions, futurity equally preſerves its influence over us, whether we remain ſolitary, or live only for others.

If our moral nature, however, be ſuch, that the object of wiſhes ſhould always appear at ſome diſtance,—if our thoughts, like the courſe of the waves, are ever active, and preſſing forward,—if our preſent enjoyments have a ſecret connection with thoſe imaginary advantages, which always terminate in a fleeting ſhadow; in ſhort, if every thing be future in the lot of man, With what love and reſpect ought we to conſider that grand ſyſtem of our higheſt hopes, of which religious principles are the majeſtic foundation? With what encouraging proſpects, far beyond all other views, does Religion preſent us! How great, how precious is that univerſal and moſt intereſting ſentiment, the deſire of prolonging our exiſtence! Nothing can be ſo dreadful to man as the idea of eternal annihilation. The total deſtruction of all thoſe faculties which compoſe

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his being, is, with regard to himſelf, equal to a diſſolution of the whole univerſe; he ought, therefore, earneſtly and above all, to ſeek a refuge from this overwhelming thought.

It is, no doubt, according to the natural diſpoſition, and in proportion to the influence of religious principles on the mind, that men lay hold, with confidence, on the hopes and promiſes of reward offered by Religion. But when our ſupreme happineſs is the object, obſcurity, doubts and uncertainty, operate very powerfully: For, even in the affairs of human life, the greatneſs of the enterpriſe excites our ambition more than the probability of ſucceſs. To what, then, ſhould we betake ourſelves,—where attach the ſlighteſt hope, were ever the belief of a God, this chief ſupport of religious ſentiments, entirely aboliſhed, were men, from their infancy, only occupied with worldly conſiderations, which are as tranſitory as themſelves, and, being thus early debaſed in their own eyes, ſhould ſtrive to ſtifle that innate ſentiment which intimates to them the ſpirituality of the ſoul? Thus diſcouraged by the firſt principles of their education, every effort being repreſſed that might carry forward their thoughts, a retroſpective view of the paſt, by recalling the irreparable loſs, would too ſtrongly attract their attention, and the mind, in the mean time, could no longer maintain the equilibrium neceſſary for the enjoyment of the preſent

ſent moment. In ſhort, the preſent inſtant, which is indeed an imperceptible fraction of time, would appear as nothing, were it not united in our thoughts to the unknown number of days and years which are before us: Since, then, the ideas of happineſs and duration which we acquire by religious principles, are in no reſpect limited, our imagination is never forced to recur on itſelf, but ſeems to be inſenſibly loſt in the immenſe extent of futurity.

While we purſue the courſe of a great river, with an extenſive horizon open to our view, we never conſider minutely the ſandy banks along which we paſs; but when, by changing our ſituation, or by twilight coming on, the proſpect is contracted, our attention is then turned to the barren channel before us, though we did not before remark all its dryneſs and ſterility. Similar to this is our ſituation in the career of human life. While the great and ſublime thoughts of infinity elevate our hopes, and exalt our ſouls, we are but little affected by the troubles and difficulties ſtrewed in our path. But if, upon changing our principles, a gloomy philoſophy ſhould darken the perſpective, our attention muſt then be invariably fixed on the objects which ſurround us; and we would then, but too diſtinctly, perceive the vanity and illuſion of all the enjoyments of which our moral nature is ſuſceptible.

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Let us then acknowledge the bleſſings which we derive from religious principles. By fixing our views on the future, they ſave us from preſent miſery; they form, without our perceiving it, the charm of the moral world; were it poſſible for us to deſtroy them by cold reaſonings, a gloomy melancholy would conſtantly oppreſs our minds; a funereal ſtole would appear to be ſpread over the charms of nature, inſtead of that robe of light which now embelliſhes them. There might, no doubt, ſtill be ſome enjoyment of life, during youth, while the pleaſures of ſenſe are ſo prevalent as to occupy the greater part of our thoughts; but when the paſſions are moderated, and the body rendered infirm by years or diſeaſe,—when that period arrives, at which moral enjoyments become the chief ſource of happineſs, In what a deplorable ſtate would we be, were thoſe opinions and thoſe hopes, totally ſubverted, which alone can truly encourage and comfort us, and were we deprived of that activity of imagination, which enlivens every object our anticipation can reach?

Let us then attentively reflect on the various unhappy conſequences which would inevitably reſult from renouncing religious principles. We would not, in them, merely loſe an imaginary, an ideal proſpect of happineſs; We ſhould loſe at once, whatever ſerves, at preſent, to excite deſire, or awaken ambition. No circumſtance appears

appears indifferent, while our actions and deſigns may be ſuch as, in a manner, conſtantly to correſpond with our duty, and while the exerciſe and improvement of our faculties may be conſidered as the commencement of an exiſtence, of which the ultimate period lies concealed from our view: But when the awful period of final diſſolution is every where preſented to our eyes, and when we approach towards it every moment, What illuſion could be ſo powerful as to ſave us from utter deſpair? Being circumſcribed within the contracted ſpace of human life, its narrow limits would be ſo conſtantly preſent to our thoughts, that, before engaging in any enterpriſe, or entering on any ſtudy, we would be often led to conſider, how little ſuch things deſerve, on our part, the diligent enquiries and indefatigable application which they demand. Yes, even fame itſelf, which is held to be immortal, could no more ſo powerfully incite us, were we certainly convinced that it can only grow, riſe and ſubſiſt during that ſhort portion of time, which is, in a manner, totally overlooked by our imagination. It is neceſſary, that the extenſive and unknown regions of futurity, if I may ſo ſpeak, ſhould ſtill be our country, in order that we may truly experience an anxious love of laſting celebrity, and that ardent deſire of performing great actions, which is its ſalutary conſequence.

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The oppofers of Religion are then, in my opinion, much miſtaken, when they accuſe religious ſentiments, of neceſſarily diſguſting us at worldly affairs and pleaſures. The notions of eternity we receive from thoſe principles, are, on the contrary, the chief ſupport of that ingenious concatenation of hopes and duties, which ſo wonderouſly compoſes our intellectual happineſs.

Religious principles are equally adapted to the weakneſs and the perfections of our nature. They afford us comfort, both under our real troubles, and under ſuch as ariſe from an abuſe of our foreſight. But above all, they are congenial with every thing that is grand and elevated in our nature. Yes, if men are animated by ſublime thoughts,—if they reſpect the intelligence with which they are adorned,—if the true dignity of their nature can intereſt them, they will fly with tranſport, to embrace Religion, which ennobles their faculties, fortifies their minds, and by its ſentiments unites them to Him, whoſe omnipotence aſtoniſhes their underſtanding. Then, indeed, conſidering themſelves as an emanation from that Infinite Being, who is the firſt ſource of all things, they can never be drawn aſide by that perverſe philoſophy, whoſe baneful leſſons tend to perſuade us, that our ſoul, our reaſon, liberty, and all our immaterial eſſence, is the mere reſult of a fortuitous combination,

bination,—of an accidental harmony without intelligence.

We have never perhaps obſerved, with ſufficient attention, the various kinds of happineſs which would either be deſtroyed, or ſenſibly weakened, were this diſcouraging doctrine ever propagated.

What then would become of that moſt ſublime of all ſentiments, *admiration*, if, inſtead of the grand view of the univerſe reviving the idea of a Supreme Being, we could only trace, in the appearances of nature, a vaſt exiſtence without deſign, cauſe or deſtination, and if even the aſtoniſhment which we felt, were but one of the ſpontaneous accidents of blind matter?

What would become of the pleaſure we feel in the progreſſive improvement, and exerciſe of our faculties,—if this intelligence, in which we glory, were only the reſult of chance, and if all our ideas were produced merely by the operation of the laws of motion: If our liberty were but a fiction, and if we had not, ſo to ſpeak, any poſſeſſion of ourſelves?

What would become of that active ſpirit of curioſity, which excites us continually to obſerve the wonders which ſurround us, and which inſpires us with a deſire of penetrating, in ſome meaſure, into the myſtery of our exiſtence, and the ſecret of our origin? It would certainly be of little avail to ſtudy the courſe of nature, if

this ſcience could only teach us the afflicting particulars of our *mechanical* ſlavery. A priſoner cannot be pleaſed, by drawing a picture of his fetters, or counting the links of his chain.

But how beautiful does the world appear, when we view it as the reſult of one ſingle and great Thought, and when we find every where, the ſtamp of an Eternal Intelligence! And how pleaſing thus to live with ſentiments of aſtoniſhment and adoration deeply impreſſed on our hearts!

What a ſubject of exultation are the endowments of the mind, when we can conſider them as a participation of a ſublime nature, of which GOD alone is the perfect model! And how delightful is the ambition of elevating ourſelves ſtill more by exerciſe, and improving all our faculties!

How charming, in ſhort, is the contemplation of nature, when, at every new diſcovery, we ſeem to advance a ſtep towards an acquaintance with that exalted wiſdom which has preſcribed laws to the univerſe, and maintains it in harmony! It is then, and only then, that ſtudy is truly intereſting, and the progreſs of knowledge an increaſe of happineſs. Under the influence of the opinions of materialiſts, our curioſity languiſhes,—our admiration is mere inſtinct,—and the ſentiments we have of ourſelves are altogether fictitious. On the contrary, with

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the idea of a God, all is animated,—all is reaſonable and true. Indeed, that truly happy idea appears as neceſſary to the moral nature of man, as heat is to vegetation.

It may perhaps be thought, that, in examining the influence of Religion on happineſs, I have dwelt on ſeveral conſiderations, which are not equally important to all men. There are, indeed, ſome more particularly adapted to that part of ſociety, whoſe minds have been cultivated by education; but I wiſh not, therefore, to withdraw my attention from the numerous claſs of mankind, whoſe happineſs and miſery depend on ſimple ideas proportioned to their circumſtances and capacities.

Thoſe who have been left, by the misfortunes of their parents, to the wide world, devoid of property, and deprived of the reſources which depend on education, appear to have the moſt preſſing and conſtant need of the aſſiſtance which religious principles afford. Men of this claſs, condemned to hard labour, are, as it were, confined in a rough and uniformly barren path,—where every ſucceeding day reſembles the preceding, in which no obſcure hopes nor flattering illuſion can amuſe them. They know that there is a wall of ſeparation between them and fortune; and if they carry forward their views in life, they only diſcover the dreadful ſtate any infirmity would reduce them to, and the deplorable ſituation to

which they may, at laſt, be expoſed, by ſuffering cruel neglect in their old age. With what tranſport then will they, in ſuch circumſtances, graſp at the comfortable hopes which Religion preſents! With what ſatisfaction will they learn, that after this probationary ſtate, where the diſparity of ranks and circumſtances chagrined and diſtreſſed them, there is a time to ſucceed, in which all conditions will be equal! How piteous would their condition be, were they to renounce that ſingle ſentiment, or rather general idea, which they are not only able to comprehend with eaſe, but can readily apply to every event and circumſtance.—'It is God's 'will,' ſay they to themſelves, and this thought, at once, confirms their reſignation.—'God will 'reward you for it,' ſay they to others, on receiving a favour; and theſe words remind them, that the God of the rich and powerful is alſo theirs; and that far from being indifferent to their fate, He deigns Himſelf to diſcharge their obligations. How many other popular expreſſions conſtantly reveal the ſame ſentiment of confidence and conſolation? This continual dependence of the poor on the Deity, raiſes them in their own eſtimation; prevents them from ſinking under a load of contempt, and often affords them courage to reſiſt the inſolence of their haughty oppreſſors. What a ſurpriſing effect is thus produced by an idea ſo ſimple!

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The moral advantages, of which Religion is the ſource, reſemble the grand bleſſings of nature which belong equally to all men; and this I conſider, above all the characteriſtics of Religion, to be more particularly the ſeal of a divine hand. The Sun, in the diſtribution of his rays, obſerves neither rank nor fortune: In the ſame way thoſe comforting ſentiments which depend on the belief of a Supreme Being, and all the hopes connected therewith, become the property of the poor as well as the rich,—of the weak as well as the powerful,—and can be as ſecurely enjoyed under the humble roof of a cottage, as in a ſuperb palace. Civil laws give a ſanction to the inequality of poſſeſſions, and Religion alone ſweetens the bitterneſs of this hard diſproportion.

We could not avoid being touched with juſt compaſſion, were we to ſuppoſe the greater part of mankind deprived at one ſtroke of the only thought which ſupports their courage. They would no more have a God to confide their ſorrows with,—they would no more attend His ordinances, to implore a ſpirit of reſignation and tranquillity,—they would have no motive for raiſing their looks to heaven: Their eyes would be caſt down, fixed for ever on this abode of grief, of death and eternal ſilence. Then thoſe conſoling tears, which are ſhed from a pleaſing perſuaſion, that there exiſts ſomewhere commiſera-

tion and goodneſs, would no more moiſten their eyes.

Every one muſt have beheld thoſe veteran ſoldiers, who are ſo often ſeen proſtrated on the pavement of the ſanctuary, erected in the midſt of their auguſt retreat. Their hair, which time has whitened, and their forehead marked with honourable ſcars; that tottering ſtep which age alone could impreſs,—all, at firſt view, inſpire reſpect; but what emotions do we feel, when we ſee them lift up and join their trembling and enfeebled hands, to invoke the God of the univerſe,—of their ſoul and thought;—when we ſee them forget, in this affecting ſcene of devotion, their preſent pains and paſt ſufferings; and when we ſee them riſe with a countenance more ſerene, and expreſſive of the tranquillity and hope which devotion has diffuſed through their ſouls! Pity them not, in theſe moments, ye who eſtimate happineſs only by worldly enjoyments! Their looks are humbled,—their body trembles, and death awaits their ſteps: But this inevitable end, whoſe very image terrifies you, they can ſee advancing without alarm. Their ſouls have approached Him who is good;—who can do every thing, and whom none ever loved without receiving comfort. Come and contemplate this ſight, ye who deſpiſe Religion,—ye who boaſt of ſcientific intelligence, come and behold, how little your pretended knowledge avails in pro-

moting happineſs! You muſt then either change the fate of men, and give them all, if you can, ſome portion of the enjoyments of life, or you muſt reſpect that ſentiment which enables them to repulſe the injuries of fortune. And ſince even the policy of tyrants has never dared to deſtroy it,—ſince their power has never been ſufficient to accompliſh this ſavage enterpriſe; Would you, to whom Nature has given ſuperior endowments, be more cruel, more inexorable than they? Or if by this pitileſs doctrine, you wiſh to deprive the old, the ſick, and the indigent, of the only idea of happineſs, which they can poſſeſs, Go to thoſe dungeons, thoſe dreary cells, where the wretched priſoners ſtruggle with their chains, and ſhut up, with your own hands, the only aperture through which any ray of light can reach them!

It is not, however, merely a ſingle claſs of ſociety which derives a conſtant advantage from religious ſentiments. Religion affords comfort to every one who has ſuffered by the abuſe of authority, by public injuſtice, or by various misfortunes,—to the virtuous man who has been calumniated,—to him who having once erred, has been cenſured with too much rigour; and, in ſhort, to all thoſe who, being convinced of the purity of their conſcience, earneſtly ſeek for a

ſecret witneſs of their intentions, and an enlightened judge of their conduct.

A man of exalted character, endowed with ſenſibility of heart, alſo experiences the neceſſity of maintaining in his mind, the conception of a Supreme Being, in whom he may concentre all the ideas of perfection which fill his imagination. To Him he refers thoſe ſentiments, which are inapplicable to the periſhing objects that ſurround him. In God alone he can find an inexhauſtible ſource of aſtoniſhment and admiration, and with Him only, he can refreſh and purify his thoughts, when fatigued by a view of the vices of mankind, and of their perpetual and uniform round of paſſions and gratifications. In ſhort, the happy idea of a God, at all times, ſoftens and embelliſhes the path of life; and by means of it, we become delightfully intereſted in all the beauties of nature. By it every thing animated enters, as it were, into communication with us. Yes, the ruſtling of the wind, the murmuring of the water, and the gentle agitation of the leaves, all excite our reflection and melt our ſouls, when we diſcover in them the works of Him whom we love,—when we can there diſtinguiſh the veſtiges of His footſteps, and the traces of His intention; and above all, when we conſider, that we ourſelves contribute to the diſplay of His power, and the ſplendour of His goodneſs.

Piety adds a new charm to the enjoyments of friendſhip. Our ſentiments cannot be circumſcribed within certain limits: Boundleſs, like thought, they would be agitated by continual anxiety, and we ſhould view the revolution of years, and the rapid courſe of time, with the utmoſt terror, did not thoſe beneficent opinions which enlarge our views of futurity, come to our aſſiſtance. Thus, while we are ſeparated from the objects of our affection, our ſolitary reflections recal them, as it were, to our preſence; and this contributes more or leſs to our happineſs, in proportion to our belief of a future exiſtence: Then, indeed, the tender melancholy in which we are plunged, is changed into a pleaſing emotion. But you, alas! above all, you who, being timid amidſt a buſtling world, or diſcouraged by diſappointments, find yourſelf a ſolitary wanderer on the earth, and partake not of the paſſions which agitate the greater part of mankind! you want a friend,—and you only ſee alliances formed from intereſted views. You want a comforter,—and you only find ambitious men, ſtrangers to all who have not power or diſtinguiſhed reputation: In ſhort, you need a confident, poſſeſſed of ſenſibility,—but the active ſcenes of ſociety diſſipate, or at leaſt weaken, every ſympathetic affection. But even when you have obtained this friend, this comforter, and this confident,—when you are united to them

them by the ſtrongeſt and moſt tender ties,—when you live in a ſon, a huſband, or a beloved wife, What elſe than the idea of a God, can enable you to ſupport the dreadful thought of ſeparation? Ah! in ſuch moments, With what tranſport do we embrace thoſe opinions which cheriſh the hope of continuity and duration! How gladly then do we lend an ear to thoſe words of comfort, which are ſo perfectly conſonant with the deſires and the wants of our ſoul! How horrible is the thought of eternal annihilation, when aſſociated with the ſentiment of love! How can we unite to that gentle participation of our intereſts and happineſs, which is the moſt animated charm of life, the inward conviction, and conſtant image of death without hope, and laſting diſſolution? How ſhall we offer the idea of abſolute *oblivion*, to thoſe affectionate minds, who have centered all their ſelf-love, all their ambition, in the objects of their eſteem and tenderneſs; and who, having, as it were, renounced themſelves, are entirely depoſited in the boſom of another, to ſubſiſt there by the ſame breath of life, and the ſame deſtiny? In ſhort, How could they bear to pronounce, at the tomb which they may one day bedew with their tears, the overwhelming words, FOR EVER and FOR EVER! Oh! horror of horrors for a feeling mind! Oh! hideous gulph, to which, if a man of ſenſibility ſhall ever approach

approach for a moment, may a friendly cloud overſhadow the dark abyſs! Fears and ſorrow afford ſome comfort, when we beſtow them on a beloved ſhade,—while we can mingle with our griefs the name of a God, and when this name is conſidered as the univerſal reſtorative of nature: But were the whole univerſe deaf to our complaints,—were the ſhades of eternal darkneſs to hide from us the object of our love, and were that endleſs night faſt approaching, ready to involve us in the ſame deſtruction,—were the unhappy ſurviver, who holds, as it were, one end of the band of union and felicity which death has broken, for ever deprived of the hope of reuniting it,—were the forlorn mourner, whoſe mind is entirely occupied with the recollection of a beloved object, unable to ſay, 'That affectionate heart is ſtill ſomewhere; that pure and celeſtial ſoul waits for me; perhaps calls me, to the preſence of that unknown Being, whom we have with joint conſent adored;'—and if, inſtead of this precious thought, we were, without any doubt or uncertainty, to conſider the earth as a ſepulchre for ever ſhut——My heart ſinks within me, and I cannot proceed. Unable to contend with ſuch dreadful images, nature itſelf ſeems to diſſolve, and the univerſe falling to wreck, appears ready to overwhelm you in its ruins. O thou ſource of our hopes, ſublime idea of a God! abandon not the man who poſ-

ſeſſes

feſſes ſenſibility. Thou art his courage;—Thou art his deſire,—Thou art his life. Leave him not deſolate, but defend him from the aſcendency of that inſipid and fatal philoſophy which would afflict him doubly, under pretence of giving him comfort.

I will make another effort; and I addreſs myſelf to you who boaſt of being enlightened by a freſh ray of wiſdom.—I am oppreſſed by the deepeſt ſorrow; a father, a mother, on whom I entirely depended, who guided me by their counſels, who guarded me with tender ſolicitude, theſe kind parents have been ſnatched from me: A ſon, a daughter, both my comfort and pride, have been cut off from my embraces: A wife, my faithful and beloved companion, whoſe words, whoſe actions, whoſe very looks, were the joy of my life, has vaniſhed from my arms. A moment of ſtrength remains, and I come to you, profound philoſophers, What have you to ſay? 'Seek for amuſements; turn 'your thoughts elſewhere: An eternal abyſs 'ſeparates you forever from the objects of your 'love; and thoſe painful recollections which 'overpower you with grief, are only a form of 'vegetation, the laſt play of organized matter.' Alas! have you ever experienced the force of love, and can you coolly pronounce theſe cruel words! Away with your mock conſolation, which I dread more than all my anguiſh. But thou,

thou, O daughter of Heaven, lovely and mild Religion, what doſt thou ſay? 'Hope, hope; 'what God gave thee, He can again reſtore.' Ah! how different is the language of theſe two comforters? How does the one debaſe us; and how much are we exalted by the other! How grievouſly does the former violate our beſt and deareſt ſentiments; while the latter gently accords with every idea that can contribute to our happineſs! Mankind are to chuſe between theſe guides; or rather they are to judge, if they love darkneſs better than light, and death better than life. They are to determine, if they prefer parching winds to the refreſhing dew; the froſt of winter to the charms of ſpring; and the barren rock, to the faireſt gifts of animated nature.

I affirm, that this world, without the idea of a God, would be a mere deſert, where men would only find a few faſcinating deluſions; from which, being ſet free by the light of reaſon, nothing would appear all around, but ſubjects of ſadneſs and diſcouragement. I have beheld the vain pomp of grandeur, the dreams of ambition, and the allurements of fame; and even whilſt the illuſion was moſt dazzling, my heart ſtill ſhrunk from it, and was attracted towards a more ſublime idea, and a more ſubſtantial conſolation. I have felt that a belief in the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, diffuſed a charm

over

over every circumſtance of life. I have experienced that this ſentiment alone was able to inſpire men with true dignity: For ſuch things as are merely perſonal, and only tend to raiſe one man a few degrees above another, are of ſmall value. We have no right to exult, unleſs we elevate the character of human nature, while we exalt ourſelves. We muſt conſider our nature as connected with that Sublime Intelligence, which ſeems to have dignified the human mind with ſome of its attributes. Then, indeed, thoſe trivial diſtinctions which are attached to tranſitory things, and on which vanity exerciſes her ſway, almoſt totally diſappear. We then leave to this queen of the world her rattle and toys, and ſeek elſewhere a better portion: Then, virtue, exalted ſentiments, and elevated views, appear the only honours which merit the emulation of mankind.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

The ſame ſubject continued. The influence of Virtue on Happineſs.

HAVING made it appear that Religion, ſo neceſſary to feeling minds, agrees perfectly with the moral nature of man, I come next to ſhew, that the habitual practice of virtue, enjoined as a duty in the name of God, is no way inconſiſtent with our happineſs. And after conſidering this important truth, I will prove this doctrine to be perfectly conſiſtent with what has been ſaid in the firſt chapter of this work, on the impoſſibility of making men attentive to the public intereſt, by the ſingle motive of perſonal intereſt.

It cannot be denied that virtue often obliges us to conquer our appetites, and ſtruggle with our paſſions. But if theſe conflicts, and the victory which attends them, lead to more ſolid and durable pleaſures, than thoſe which folly and vice preſent, How much are thoſe miſtaken, who imagine that the temporary and beneficial

reſtraints

reſtraints enjoined by the laws of morality amount to an abſolute ſacrifice of every enjoyment?

If we fix our attention on the various objects of deſire which occupy the thoughts of men, we muſt at once perceive, that, were they to abandon themſelves to their propenſities without controul, they would often widely deviate from that ſtate of happineſs, which forms the object of their wiſhes. None of the bleſſings which are ſtrewed here and there in our path, can entirely fill the void of life. Do the gratifications of ſenſe enſlave us? Their duration is determined by our own weakneſs; and we cannot break through the immutable limits oppoſed by nature. Are we deſirous of the advantages dependent on opinion, as honour, praiſe, and the exterior ſplendour beſtowed by riches? Soon will we perceive, when we have obtained them, that the charm has vaniſhed. They are like Proteus in the fable, who appeared a god only at a diſtance. Men have therefore more need than many have ſuppoſed, of an intereſt independent of their ſenſes and imagination; and this intereſt we find in the duties religious morality inculcates and eſtabliſhes.

At all times, and in all circumſtances, we may have a choice between good and evil. Thus, virtue may be continually in a ſtate of action; and we find it applicable to almoſt every minute, and ſeemingly indifferent, occurrence of life.

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For virtue alone has the happy power of connecting little things with great and ſublime ſentiments; and it is virtue only, that can be accompanied by that conſciouſneſs of rectitude, which, while it is the concomitant of our thoughts and actions, ſeems to enlarge our exiſtence, and to afford joys unknown to thoſe who do not act from principle.

The love of pleaſure, vanity, and ambition, are paſſions which would ſoon be extinguiſhed, were they not maintained by the continual buſtle of ſociety, which produces new ſcenes, and diſplays, every moment, ſome change of decoration. Virtue, ſatisfied with its own proſpects, requires only a uniform ſucceſſion of ſimilar ſentiments; and however its paths may be varied, the end it has in view is ever the ſame.

When we ſeek for thoſe enjoyments which depend on the imaginary advantages of opinion, we reſt our happineſs on laws dictated by others: And hence muſt ariſe a diſcordancy, by which we will be affected with a thouſand painful emotions. Virtue has no aſſociates in her counſels; ſhe herſelf determines what is right. In this reſpect, a virtuous man is the moſt independent being that exiſts; for it is from himſelf alone that he receives commands, and expects approbation. Yes, the obſcure man, who does good in ſecret, is more maſter of himſelf, than any one ſeemingly loaded with all the goods of fortune,

who has need of the tranſient modes of faſhion, to regulate his vanity, and determine his taſte.

The trivial paſſions, which are directed to worldly objects in ſearch of happineſs, lead us from one ſcene of illuſion to another, and the ultimate objects of our deſire ſtill appear at a diſtance. Virtue, on the contrary, carries its recompenſe in itſelf. It truſts not for happineſs, to the ſucceſs of uncertain events, but to the firmneſs of its own reſolution,—to the calmneſs which accompanies it, and the ſecret ſentiment which precedes it. Recollection compoſes the principal happineſs of virtue, whilſt worldly vanity is tormented by the remembrance of what is gone for ever; and with regard to the violent emotions of the paſſions in general, the paſt is but a gloomy ſhadow, from which proceeds, from time to time, ſorrow and remorſe.

The intervals which occur between the ſtarts of violent paſſions, are always filled up with ſadneſs and apathy. It is well known, that, according to the laws of nature, ſtrong and violent ſenſations produce languor, the moment the tumult is over. Virtue knows none of the irregular emotions, in the enjoyment of thoſe pleaſures peculiar to itſelf, becauſe all its principles are firm, and it acts, as it were, round its own centre. Beſides, it is conſtantly inviting us, to ſet a juſt value on that ſort of happineſs which is beſt accommodated to our powers. It dictates its firſt laws in the

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boſom of domeſtic life, and employs all its ſtrength to ſuſtain, by the ties of duty, our moſt rational and ſimple affections.

Virtue is peculiarly uſeful in delivering men from the tormenting ſolicitude of doubt and heſitation, by preſenting a general ſyſtem of conduct; and, above all, by marking out a decided path, which may guide them in their thoughts and in their actions. Men who are hurried away by their imagination, and who find themſelves always deceived by phantoms, are ready to adorn thoſe which have laſt eſcaped them with the moſt glowing colours;—virtue, on the contrary, only ſets a value on what it poſſeſſes, and never knows regret. It would ſeem, at firſt glance, that the deſires and caprices of the imagination, cannot be ſubjected to the ſlighteſt reſtraint: But theſe nimble harbingers of our will, have need of a guide, and often of a maſter. Our firſt inclinations and ſentiments are generally feeble and wavering; and it is eſſential to our happineſs, that the vibrating ſtalk from which they ſpring, ſhould be fixed and ſupported: And ſuch is the ſervice which virtue renders to the human mind.

We diſcover no uniformity in the conduct of thoſe who are not influenced by motives of duty. Convenience being their only guide, they have too great a multiplicity of matters to regulate and determine upon every moment. To render

the taſk of managing ourſelves more ſimple, we ſhould ſubmit to the government of a principle which may be readily applicable to moſt of our deliberations.

In ſhort, virtue has this great advantage, that it holds ſacred the private rights of the different members of the community; and thus all its ſentiments ſeem to be united to the general harmony. The paſſions, on the contrary, are almoſt always hoſtile. The vain man deſires that others ſhould grace his triumphs,—the proud, wiſhes them to feel their inferiority,—the ambitious, that they ſhould not impede his career,—the imperious, that they ſhould bend to him. The caſe is ſimilar with regard to the various competitions which ariſe from an immoderate deſire of fame or fortune. Every one wiſhes to go alone in the path he chooſes, or, at leaſt, to advance before the reſt; and every one being occupied with his own intereſt, inconſiderately prejudices that of his neighbours. Virtue, following a very different courſe, fears neither rivals nor competitors; it does not juſtle with any one. The road is ſpacious, and all may walk at their eaſe. Morality is the tie of that happy alliance, which connects men by the ſame ſentiments, the ſame motives and hopes, and makes them dependent on that chain of duties and principles, which unites the virtues of men to the grand Model of all Perfections.

Virtue guards us from the ſnares of ſenſuality: It checks our blind deſires, and is the baſis of our trueſt wiſdom. It protects not, indeed, our intereſts of a day, and our momentary pleaſures; but it is the ſafeguard of our whole life. It is, ſo to ſpeak, the protector of futurity, the repreſentative of duration; and becomes, to the *feelings*, what foreſight is to the *mind*. With regard to our private conduct, then, we ought to conſider virtue as a prudent friend, taught by the experience of all ages, who directs our ſteps, and never lets the taper waver, whoſe ſalutary light ought to guide us in our courſe. Our tumultuous paſſions ſeem each to diſpute the honour of ruling us without controul. It is therefore neceſſary that a maſter ſhould aſſign to each its proper limits,—one who may be able to keep all thoſe petty domeſtic tyrants in peace,—one who may command immediate reſpect, and diſconcert their combinations, like Ulyſſes arriving ſuddenly amidſt the hundred kings who had taken poſſeſſion of his palace.

Virtue, ſome will ſay, ſevere in its ſentiments, and auſtere in its forms, might deprive us of our greateſt happineſs,—the pleaſure of being beloved. I anſwer, that virtue, in its perfect ſtate, has none of theſe characteriſtics. I conſider virtue to be a juſt ſentiment of order, which, far from baniſhing other comforts, is naturally conducive to them. Thus, benevolence and

forbearance, ſo ſuitable to human weakneſs,—the ſocial ſpirit, ſo conſiſtent with our nature,—that ſuavity of manners and diſcourſe, which is the amiable expreſſion of a heart that ſeeks to unite itſelf with others,—all theſe qualities, far from being ſtrangers to true virtue, are its concomitants and brighteſt ornaments.

In ſhort, to be brief on a ſubject of ſuch latitude, virtue is connected with all thoſe ideas which tend to enlarge the mind. It accuſtoms us, early in life, to weigh conſequences, and frequently to ſacrifice our immediate pleaſures to diſtant conſiderations. Of all our ſentiments, virtue carries us fartheſt beyond our preſent exiſtence, and conſequently has the neareſt relation to thought. By virtue, then, man muſt acquire a knowledge of all his ſtrength and grandeur. Vice, on the contrary, confines us within the narroweſt limits. It ſeems to be conſcious of its own deformity, and fears all that ſurrounds it. It would fix us to a ſingle object,—a ſingle moment, and would concentre all our exiſtence in one ſmall point.

I muſt add, that virtue, by uniting all our ſentiments and actions to a certain motive, habituates the mind to orderly and juſt apprehenſions, and prevents us from wandering in uncertainty. Thus I have often thought, that, in the adminiſtration of public affairs, an immoral man is not dangerous merely by his vices; we

may

may alſo fear, that he is unable to take a comprehenſive view, or to collect his thoughts ſo as to direct them towards any general principle. He perceives nothing of the general harmony, and every rule becomes burdenſome to him. He can only act by ſtarts; and it is merely by his verſatility, that he ſometimes ſtumbles on what is right.

It may then be truly ſaid, that morality ſerves as ballaſt to our ſentiments. Its aid enables us to go on in our courſe, without being continually agitated by the caprices of our imagination, and without being obliged to turn back at the firſt appearance of an obſtacle.

Thus virtue, whilſt it enlarges the mind, alſo gives becoming dignity to the character. Of all the qualities of men, there is none ſo truly reſpectable as that elevation of thought, ſentiment and manners, ſo rarely met with,—that majeſtic conſiſtency of character, which truth alone can preſerve, but which the ſmalleſt degree of boaſting or affectation would diſconcert and baniſh. This elevation of mind reſembles not pride and vanity; for it is its higheſt ornament, that it ſeeks not the homage of others. The man who is endowed with this real dignity, is placed even above his judges. He accounts not with them: He lives under the government of his conſcience; and, proud of ſuch a noble ruler, he depends not on any other guide. But as this grandeur

is entirely in his own breaſt, it neceſſarily ceaſes to exiſt, when he dictates to others what he expects from them; and it can only be reſtrained within its juſt limits, by thoſe ſimple virtues, which are of all others the leaſt dazzling.

To the ſame principle, men owe that noble reſpect for truth, which is the higheſt ornament of a great ſoul. To it is owing that happy ſimplicity of thought and diſcourſe, which indicates a conſcience that requires not to be kept on its guard. A man who is truly honeſt, conſiders diſguiſe as a detractor, and deſires to appear as he really is. It is not his intereſt to conceal his weakneſſes; for theſe, in a generous heart, are, for moſt part, united to ſome good diſpoſitions; and perhaps frankneſs might have become the policy of his mind, if it had not been one of the qualities of his character.

There is a native beauty in every virtue, which delights us without reflection. Our moral ſenſe, when it is improved by education, is pleaſed with that ſocial harmony which the ſentiments of juſtice preſerve. Thoſe enjoyments are unknown to ſelfiſh men, who are inſenſible to every kind of concord, and who merit our contempt in one eſſential particular: They wiſh to avail themſelves of that reſpect which others have for order and virtue, without ſubjecting themſelves to the ſame rules, and without candidly declaring their intention. In this view, a want of morality,

lity, ſeems to me, a real breach of the laws of hoſpitality.

In ſhort, talents, and thoſe faculties of the mind which immediately belong to nature, can never be applied to great objects, without the aid of morality. There is no other way of uniting the intereſts of men, and of gaining their love and reſpect. Honeſty reſembles thoſe ancient idioms, to which we muſt accommodate our ſpeech, in order to be underſtood by the multitude; and a language is never well known without habitual practice. In circumſcribed ſituations, good ſenſe ſometimes enables us to acquire an aſcendency. There men are taken one by one; and we often engage them by ſtudying their characters, and proportioning ourſelves to their depth. But on a more extenſive ſcene, and chiefly in public adminiſtration, where we muſt conſider men as a collective body, it is neceſſary to provide a tie ſufficient to comprehend the whole; and this can only be accompliſhed by the union of talents and virtue. When I ſee homage paid by a nation to virtuous characters,—when I remark the almoſt inſtinctive judgment which aſſiſts in diſcerning them,—when I ſee nothing loved or praiſed that is not connected with pure virtue, and noble intention,—I return to my favourite ſentiment, and I recogniſe in theſe general emotions, the ſtamp of a Divine Hand.

HAVING

HAVING given a ſlight ſketch of the various advantages which flow from regularity of principles and propriety of conduct, it may perhaps be aſked, If man may not be attached to morality, by the ſingle motive of perſonal intereſt? I formerly mentioned, that I intended to anſwer this objection, which I now do as follows: Virtue, in its moſt improved ſtate, ſuch as we have repreſented it, is not the work of a moment. It muſt be called forth and ſtrengthened by degrees; but it would be nipped in the bud, were we to deſtroy thoſe ſimple opinions which cheriſh it,—were we to aboliſh the only end and motive perceptible by men of every capacity,—and were we to weaken the ſentiments which tend to encourage thoſe who reſpect the laws of morality, and wiſh to promote their cultivation.

Beſides, it is not virtue ſingly, but virtue when united with its different motives, which contributes to our happineſs. This is an important obſervation, and the truth of it may be eaſily demonſtrated. Employment is generally reckoned the moſt certain ſource of thoſe agreeable impreſſions, of which our nature is ſuſceptible; but its charm would vaniſh, if it did not lead to ſome recompenſe; if it did not ſhow in perſpective, an increaſe of wealth,—the gratification of ſelf-love,—a chance for fame, or ſome other advantage, of which we are ambitious. Vainly is it ſaid, that the exerciſe of our faculties is itſelf a pleaſure.

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It is only ſo, in ſo far as it offers to our view a train of proſpects ſucceeding each other. But there muſt always be a ſtrong motive to urge us on to the courſe; our bark muſt be driven on by the wind: In ſhort, every kind of labour requires encouragement; though labour, proportioned to our ſtrength, may contribute more to our happineſs than ſloth and idleneſs. This truth would ſtrike us ſtill more forcibly, if we were able to analyze it with ſufficient accuracy, and to diſtinguiſh clearly the degree of happineſs annexed to action and employment itſelf, from that which relates entirely to the end and motive of that action.

Theſe reflections are equally applicable to virtue. We can eaſily perceive, from conſidering the effects of virtue, that it is an excellent guide in the courſe of life; and we muſt alſo diſcover, at the ſame time, that, like employment, it requires ſome incitement, ſome obvious encouragement, accommodated to every underſtanding. Religious ſentiments afford this encouragement to virtue; and it could not be ſeparated from ſuch motives and hopes as Religion preſents, without deſtroying every affinity it has with the happineſs of mankind.

I readily perceive the great advantages we may derive from morality; but I obſerve, at the ſame time, that, in order to follow its counſels with confidence and firmneſs, the greater part of mankind

mankind want that degree of ſcience, and that power of reflection, which the ſtudy of a matter ſo complex, neceſſarily requires. We, therefore, need ſome motive to excite our firſt effort,—to diſpoſe us to ſelf-denial,—and to determine us to ſtruggle with courage againſt the dominion of the preſent moment.

In ſhort, even when, by ſophiſtical reaſoning, ſome philoſophers have thrown the true principles of order and happineſs into confuſion,—when, by their addreſs, they may lead us to doubt of the kind and degree of influence we ſhould aſſign to religious opinions,—the legiſlators of a nation ought never to liſten to their ſubtle diſtinctions. Metaphyſical ſentiments and ideas are only proper for ſtateſmen, when uſed to defend them from the aſcendency of ſpecious errors, and to confirm their reſpect for uſeful truths. But a wiſe ſtateſman, in regulating his thoughts and actions, will always employ the moſt ſimple ideas; nor will he deſpiſe thoſe common maxims and principles, of which time rather than ſcience has demonſtrated the utility. Theſe may be conſidered as ſo many leſſons, which long experience has gradually diveſted of every thing unfavourable to natural morality, and the innate ſentiments of men.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

Of Religious Sentiments, as connected with the Sovereign.

THE inhabitants of many nations have ſubjected their wills to the authority of an individual. They have thus erected a perpetual monument to the ſpirit of diſcord and injuſtice, which has ſo frequently reigned amongſt them. It is true, that they have, from time to time, recollected their ability of aſſerting their natural rights. But Monarchs, aware of their inconſtancy, have taken care to fortify the ſprings of authority, by ſurrounding themſelves with ſtanding armies. They have only left their ſubjects the power of being diſguſted with their ſlavery. Soldiers and taxes have mutually ſupported each other; and by means of their mutual action, the Sovereign becomes maſter and director of every thing. With what vaſt power of diſpenſing good and evil is he then entruſted! We muſt, therefore, wiſh that his mind were impreſſed with powerful moral principles, proportioned

portioned to the immenſe extent of his duty. But what effect can morality have, if he believe not that it is ſupported by a divine ſanction,—if he conſider it as a human inſtitution, which he has power to break or modify at pleaſure? In that caſe, he will examine, like other men, how far his private intereſt agrees with that of the public, and his conduct will depend on the reſult of this calculation.

I confeſs, that in the elevated ſituation in which kings are placed, they cannot experience thoſe paſſions which proceed from our trivial competitions: But what a multitude of other paſſions have they to repreſs? And with what celerity muſt that be done, ſince they never experience contradiction, and are not, like the greater part of men, obliged, on ſome occaſions, to reflect deliberately? Beſides, though Sovereigns are ſuppoſed to be ſheltered, by their ſituation, from the temptation offered by ſelf-intereſt, and the deſire of fortune or advancement, they are far from being diveſted of every ſentiment of this kind. They feel thoſe emotions towards other princes. Thus their envy, ambition and revenge become very dangerous, ſince, by means of war, they involve all their ſubjects in their quarrels. Then, indeed, were they freed from religious ties, they might conſider morality as an ingenious invention, to render the maintenance of public order more eaſy, and preſerve that

that ſubordination which ſecures their power; but they themſelves would not acknowledge its authority,—far leſs would they take the lead in obeying its dictates.

It will no doubt be ſaid, that a king who purſues the path of virtue, will be recompenſed by the love of his ſubjects; but I have already ſhown, that the influence of public opinion would be but very weak, if the moral principles which guide that opinion, were not ſupported by Religion. It ſhould alſo be obſerved, that elogium and applauſe, that kind of homage ſo flattering to individuals, has not an equal effect on princes, who cannot, like private men, conſider this ſuffrage as an earneſt or forerunner of exaltation. By the continual view of the victories and advantages obtained by others, the deſire of reſpect and diſtinction is conſtantly maintained. It may, perhaps, proceed, in ſome meaſure, from the ſtimulation of envy; or, at leaſt, from thoſe jarring intereſts, and thoſe ſelfiſh ſtruggles, of which ſociety alone can be the theatre. Princes being without rivals, are not ſuſceptible of ſuch impreſſions. The flattery they have ſo early imbibed, and the partial and intereſted praiſe laviſhed on them, render them leſs ſenſible to merited applauſe than other men. In ſhort, exaggerated praiſe ſoon becomes a dull monotony, and extinguiſhes, by its uniformity, that emulation which may be excited by a juſt degree

of

of admiration and reſpect. It would then be, indeed, very dangerous to repoſe on the power of public opinion, as a check ſufficient to replace, in the minds of princes, the reſtraining force of religious morality.

I will now make another important remark: Thoſe who are placed around the Monarch, frequently miſlead his judgment, by the nature and tendency of the encomiums they beſtow on him. The praiſes offered to a Monarch, have always a taint of ſlaviſh adulation. Thus, in countries where the Sovereign is abſolute, a look, a word from the Prince, which ſeems, for an inſtant, to efface the diſtance that ſeparates him from his ſubjects, delights them; and their enthuſiaſm, in thoſe moments, perſuades the monarch that it is ſufficient for him to ſmile, in order to render his people happy. Dangerous illuſion,—ſad effect of debaſement of character! in ſhort, when the yoke is rendered habitual, men become pleaſed with exalting the power of him to whom they are obliged to ſubmit: They love to ſee their ſervile companions multiplied: And as the greater part of them have ſeldom any acceſs to the prince, vanity perſuades them, that, by affecting to participate in the royal grandeur, they ſeem to contract a ſort of familiarity with it. Therefore, without conſidering whether the Sovereign will be better able to make them happy, by enlarging his territories, and by acquiring more

ſubjects,

ſubjects, and conſequently, ſubjecting himſelf to more cares, they extol the conquering warrior; and thus invite princes to prefer military glory to every other purſuit. As the multitude can quickly comprehend this kind of merit, and as the gaining of a battle is a ſimple idea, readily comprehended by men of all ranks and capacities, military victories alone are univerſally extolled, and theſe alone are thought ſufficient to excuſe broken treaties, violated oaths, and alliances abandoned. In ſhort, ſuch is the abſurd extravagance of the praiſe beſtowed on warlike achievements, that the tranquillity of the ſtate,—the repoſe of the people,—the mild bleſſings of peace, are no more conſidered as the great and ultimate objects of the ſucceſsful toils of the Monarch. Hiſtory itſelf, often preſents thoſe happy times, as the days of obſcurity, which only ſerved to prepare and educate for blood and carnage, thoſe heroes,—thoſe kings diſſatisfied with their lot, who became warriors through ambition; and to whom, becauſe they were happy in their conqueſts, ſome hiſtorians would have us to aſſign the higheſt honours, and the nobleſt wreaths of fame.

Thus, the public opinion, and the voice of renown ſometimes deceive Princes, and appear in oppoſition to thoſe moral inſtructions, and thoſe ancient rules of legiſlation, which point out the intereſt of the people as the chief object of the

Sovereign's attention,—which require him not merely to ſeek celebrity by warlike actions, but to enforce thoſe duties which become the high character of Guardian of the Public Welfare,—thoſe extenſive duties, that are better diſcharged by the ſecret labour of paternal vigilance, than by the noiſe of the drum, and by the inſtruments of deſtruction.

LET us now conſider the effect of public opinion on Sovereigns, with regard to the interior functions of adminiſtration alone. Here an eſſential obſervation readily occurs: The thirſt of glory is ſtrongly felt, when a Prince finds ſome great abuſes to be reformed, and when he hopes to make regularity ſucceed to confuſion. But, when this taſk is fulfilled, and nothing remains but to preſerve the good order which ſubſiſts, the love of fame has not ſufficient aliment: The virtue of a Prince is then, indeed, the only true ſecurity of the public welfare.

It may be poſſible for a Prince to regulate the affairs of his kingdom in ſuch a manner, that ſcarce any thing ſhall remain to be done, which might diſtinguiſh the reigns of his immediate ſucceſſors. New troubles and fears would then be neceſſary to awake, in the breaſts of the people, the ſentiment of reſpect for their Sovereign, and to reſtore the original force and aſcendency of royal authority.

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We may alſo, on the contrary, figure a very different period, when, by a progreſſive degradation of character, the public opinion ſhall no more lead the way, and the praiſes which the enfeebled voice of fame reſounds, no more be conſidered as a powerful motive of ambition and reward. Thus, in a country, or in a metropolis, where venality becomes triumphant,—where every one purſues his fortune by contributing to the intrigues and vices of thoſe who beſtow it, neither regard for the real intereſt of the people, nor an attention to lighten their burdens, would be a ſubject of renown. In like manner, in a country where deſpotiſm reigns, and the people are accuſtomed to proſtrate themſelves before ſuperior power, they would acknowledge no other idol. We could not there acquire the praiſe of our cotemporaries, by elevation of character,—by tempering the exerciſe of authority with wiſdom, and by allowing to the citizens that degree of freedom which they may ſafely enjoy. Morality, then alone, can, at all times, and in all circumſtances, reſiſt thoſe revolutions of cuſtom and opinion, of which men are ever ſuſceptible, and of which hiſtory furniſhes ſo many examples.

I muſt not omit another important conſideration: Princes, by the elevation of their rank, and their influence on the manners of the nation, find themſelves in that peculiar ſituation, where one is rather called to direct the public opinion than

to receive from it inſtruction and encouragement. We muſt therefore wiſh that a Monarch ſhould have ſuch principles as flow from the heart, and are founded on reflection; from ſuch ſentiments alone, he can, at all times, derive a ſtrength properly his own, and a due proportion of courage. A Prince muſt weigh his own conduct, and decide on his own greatneſs. Sublime moral principles ſhould maintain in his heart an ideal model of perfection, with which he may conſtantly compare the opinions of the world, and the private judgment of his conſcience.

In ſhort, and this reflection will agree, in a general way, with the preceding remarks,—The public opinion, when unfavourable, does not always penetrate immediately to the ear of the Prince. It prevails throughout the kingdom, and wanders around the palace; but no whiſper reaches him. Vanity, pride, and every vice, find an eaſier acceſs. The old courtiers aſk, with indignation, What it has to do there? and the humbler creatures, that are fluttering about in purſuit of intereſt or favour, turn it to ridicule. The miniſter whom it purſues with clamour and importunity, makes light of it to his maſter; and if it comes to the knowledge of the Prince, ſome method is deviſed to weaken the impreſſion, by attributing the diſcontents of which it is expreſſive to private paſſions, and giving,

giving the name of a *factious ſpirit*, to a juſt indignation againſt vice. Yes, ſuch is the unhappy fate of princes, that the peace of a ſtate is often tottering, before they can be informed of the ſentiments of the people, and diſcover the truth. Theſe conſiderations afford a further proof, that the power of public opinion can never equal in utility, thoſe grand principles of morality, which, by the aid of religious ſentiments, are fixed in the hearts of men; and there dictate laws and enforce their obſervance, without diſtinction of birth, rank or dignity.

But if, from Sovereigns, we carry our view to thoſe who ſhare their confidence, we ſhall, ſtill more evidently, perceive the abſolute neceſſity of an active and governing morality. Miniſters, deſtitute of virtue, are more to be feared than Sovereigns indifferent to the public good. As they have been but lately elevated above the crowd, they know better than the Monarch, how to take advantage of the vices and paſſions of mankind; and as they are cloſely connected with ſociety, and with the different orders of the ſtate, their corruptions are propagated, and their dangerous influence ſpreads all around. But at length, however, attacked by the public cenſure, they become ſtill more miſchievous by the means which they adopt to ward off danger: For deſpairing of their artifices, before the watchful eyes of the whole nation, they turn their

addreſs againſt the Prince: They ſtudy and pry into all his weakneſſes; and they artfully encourage ſuch of them as may protect or cover the defects of their own characters. At the ſame time, they endeavour to adorn vice with every grace that can render it amiable; and attempt to throw an odium on virtue, by repreſenting it as auſtere, imperious, unſociable, and almoſt incompatible with our cuſtoms and manners. Thus, miniſters who are not reſtrained by the influence of virtuous principles, not only occaſion the miſery of a country while their influence laſts, but even poiſon the ſource of public felicity, by weakening, in the Monarch, his ſentiments of duty, perverting his good diſpoſitions, and diſcouraging, ſo to ſpeak, his natural virtues. Theſe views ſuggeſt another important obſervation: The Prince, after having deviated from the path of true glory, may return when he pleaſes, to the love of virtue and greatneſs. All the avenues are open to him, all hearts ready to welcome him; we have an inclination to love and a deſire to eſteem him whom fate has placed at the head of the nation, and who appears to us inveſted with majeſty, derived from a long train of anceſtors, and crowned with the dazzling luſtre of a diadem. We adopt, with pleaſure, any interpretation which can excuſe his conduct. We impute to evil counſels the faults which he has committed; and are eager to enter with him

into

into a new contract of eſteem and hope.—The caſe is very different with miniſters; a like indulgence is not due to them, for they cannot throw the blame on others, as their actions proceed entirely from themſelves. Thus, when a miniſter has once loſt the good opinion of the public, his depravity will daily increaſe; becauſe, in order to maintain his place, he is obliged to redouble his intrigues and diſſimulation.

After due conſideration, I am convinced, that virtuous principles in Princes, miniſters, and all the powers of government in general, are the great ſource of the happineſs of the people, and the true wiſdom of empires. We are apt to deſpiſe it, becauſe it is not of our invention; and we often give the preference to thoſe artifices of the mind which lead us aſtray, becauſe they are our own work. Perhaps theſe artifices may be neceſſary, after we have loſt ſight of religious morality, our ſure and faithful guide,—that companion of true genius, which, like it, prefers eaſy and ſimple means. Yes, exalted virtue, like ſuperior abilities, rejects thoſe reſources and inventions which derive not their origin from elevation of ſentiment, or greatneſs of thought; and whilſt the firſt obliges a ſtateſman to reſpect honour, juſtice and truth, the latter enables him to unite theſe principles with the juſt means which ſtrengthen authority, and with the true glory and conſtant ſucceſs of political meaſures. In

ſhort, whilſt the one renders him anxious about the intereſts of the people, the other ſhows, how their happineſs might inſenſibly produce a harmony of intereſts and inclinations, beyond what has been hitherto known.

If we now attend to the private happineſs of Princes, we ſhall readily perceive, that they are in abſolute need of the encouragement which religious ſentiments afford. Their diſtinguiſhed authority cannot but appear to them a ſingular privilege; they believe this power ſhould extend to every thing, and inconſiderately ſeek to accelerate the moments of enjoyment. But, as they cannot change the law of nature, by thus haſtily giving way to whatever attracts their imagination, they ſoon reduce themſelves to feel the ſad languor of indifference, and the oppreſſion of apathy.

Kings, in the exerciſe of their moral ſenſations, are expoſed to ſimilar contrarieties. They are placed, from their birth, on the pinnacle of fortune, and conſequently have never been led on from one proſpect to another, nor known thoſe gradations through which their ſubjects paſs in the purſuit of vanity and ambition. Alas! they are ſo quickly obeyed, and their deſires ſo ſoon gratified, that their appetites and inclinations cannot be renewed with ſufficient rapidity, to fill up the irkſome vacuities which ſo often recur. Soon would

would they arrive at that period, in which the future would represent only an insipid monotony, a dull uniformity of objects, were the magnificent views which Religion presents to piety obscured, and were these to be considered as fallacious illusions, unworthy of serious attention.

The numerous duties of a Prince may, no doubt, become a great source of gratification. But it is necessary, that those who need neither favour nor advancement from their fellow-creatures, but have every thing at their command, should always connect their various duties with that grand idea, which alone can constantly animate their thoughts and actions. How much would it contribute to their happiness, to place themselves sometimes, as it were, between the magnificent prospect of futurity and this world, in which they are weary of their own power! and with what fresh delight would such contemplations lead them back to the exercise of their authority! What pleasure then would a Monarch feel in that authority, the source of so much good! What delight would he thus find in imitating, more than others can, the divine beneficence,—the most pleasant and comfortable of all ideas! And what happy moments for him, while conscious of the presence of the divine and bountiful Friend of the human race, he can, in the morning, reflect on the people he is about to make happy, and in the evening on those to whom he has

has done good. What a difference between thoſe delicious moments, whoſe influence the whole nation feels, and thoſe inſignificant levees, known to none but courtiers, where the Monarch only ſhows himſelf, and taſtes the dull pleaſure of ſeeing ſo many men cringing before his very ſhadow! what a difference between theſe rapturous inſtants, and the vain parades, amidſt which, dazzled by every form of adulation, he cannot diſtinctly perceive whether he is a Great Man, or merely a King!

It cannot be denied, that the more extenſive the horizon is, which opens before Sovereigns, the more numerous are the duties preſented to their reflection, and the more they will feel themſelves in need of aſſiſtance from a power ſuperior to their own ſtrength. They are conſcious of the diſproportion which exiſts between the extent of their authority, and the means intruſted to human nature. They can only maintain their firmneſs, by laying hold of that myſterious pillar, erected by Religion,—by that ſupport alone they can conſider without terror, that Providence has called them to regulate and direct the deſtiny of an empire. By meditating with profound attention on the exiſtence of a God, and reflecting on the influence and various relations of ſuch a grand idea, Marcus Aurelius diſcovered all the extent of his duties, and felt at the ſame time both cou-

rage

rage and inclination to fulfil them. The happy and conſtant agreement of his actions with his principles, rendered his reign illuſtrious, and has made it a laſting example of morality and wiſdom.

We muſt then conclude, That it is to virtue, ſupported by every ſentiment which it imprints on the human heart, that we ſhould confide the ſacred depoſit of public happineſs. Virtue only, is always faithful and vigilant; it, alone, needs not the excitement of praiſe, but, by exhibiting to their view ſome great example, leads men to the knowledge of all that is worthy of their admiration.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Objection drawn from the Wars and Commotions which Religious Opinions have occaſioned.

I SHALL preſent this objection in its full force; nor will I ſeek to weaken it. Every one knows, with what numerous miſchiefs, during a long ſeries of generations, we may reproach the blind and ſavage zeal of religious fanaticiſm. No one is ignorant of thoſe multiplied acts of intolerance which have ſullied the annals of hiſtory, and thoſe ſcenes of diſcord, war, and fury, which theological controverſies have excited amongſt mankind. Every one may have heard of the fatal conſequences which theſe enterprizes have brought in their train; and which even the exalted virtues of a great King * have been inſufficient to juſtify. In ſhort, were we to deſcribe thoſe ſanguinary days, in which a difference in particular tenets, was followed by a ſentence of proſcription, and the dreadful ſignal of the moſt cruel tortures which frenzy could inflict, it would be ſufficient to maintain, in all ages, a remembrance

* LOUIS XIV.

remembrance of the fatal abuſes which have been committed in the name of the God of Peace.

Thus, enormous tyranny and ferocious enthuſiaſm have, at all times, afforded cauſe of triumph to the eager detractors of Religion. Let us examine, however, if the inferences which they wiſh to deduce from thoſe errors of the human mind, are founded on reaſon and juſtice.

I need not here remark, that religious opinions have often been rather the pretext, than the true motive of the unhappy convulſions of which they, at preſent, appear to be the ſole origin: Neither need I enumerate the various political advantages, that have proceeded from Religion, of which hiſtory has conſecrated the auguſt monuments. I ſhall limit this diſcuſſion to a few ſimple reflections; and I ſhall only call in *reaſon* to my aid.

Will it be pretended, that by reciting the various abuſes of authority, we might prove the advantages of anarchy? Could we decry every ſpecies of juriſprudence, by recounting the evils which reſult from chicane? Should we be able to throw an odium on the ſciences, by recalling all the fatal diſcoveries, which are owing to our reſearches? Would it ſtifle every degree of ſelf-love and activity, were we to relate the numerous crimes which have ariſen from covetouſneſs, pride and ambition? And ſhall we then deſire to annihilate religious ſentiments, becauſe fanaticiſm

ticiſm has ſometimes made uſe of them to diſtreſs mankind? Theſe queſtions are ſimilar, and ſhould be all reſolved in the ſame manner. Thus, in all our intereſts, and in all our paſſions, we can only diſtinguiſh *right* from *wrong* by ſagacity and the light of reaſon; and we ought to beware of confounding mere proximity with real identity.

Fanaticiſm and Religion have no connection whatever, although they are too often found united. Neither the worſhip of the common Father of men, nor the morality of the Goſpel, which dictates forbearance and goodneſs, can inſpire the ſpirit of perſecution. It muſt be attributed to blind madneſs, like the other errors and crimes which diſhonour humanity. But ſince the preſent exceſſes to which men abandon themſelves, do not lead us to conſider as a misfortune, all thoſe ſentiments of which the criminal paſſions are only the extreme, Why would we refuſe Religion the gratitude which is its due, becauſe ſometimes it has given birth to hatred, and unhappy diviſions? We ſhould rather remark, that intolerant zeal is, of all the errors of the human mind, the one on which the progreſs of knowledge appears to have had the greateſt influence. In fact, whilſt fanaticiſm, gradually weakened, ſeems now faſt verging towards its decline, the common diſorderly paſſions of ambition, love of wealth, and thirſt of pleaſure, remain

main in their full force. But what ſentiment, what predominant idea, has a greater claim to pardon for its miſtakes than devotion? By what an infinite number of benefits does Religion compenſate the abuſes which reſult from falſe interpretations of its precepts! We have already ſhown that men owe to this ſpirit, the ſtability of public order, and the firm principles of juſtice: It procures to the indigent, the ſuccour of charity,—to virtue its encouragement,—to diſtreſſed innocence its only refuge,—and to ſenſibility its beſt and deareſt hopes. Yes, the pure ſpirit of Religion ſurrounds us, as it were, on every ſide. It is the charm of ſolitude,—the band of ſociety, and the ſtrengthener of our intimate affections. It lives in us,—it animates all around us,—and carries our hopes beyond our preſent exiſtence. Shall we then calumniate it? Shall we endeavour to deſtroy it, on recollecting the tyrannic opinions of a few Prieſts and Sovereigns, whoſe principles and conduct we now deteſt?

Again, I will aſk, Why men would denounce a ſentence of reprobation againſt religious opinions, and give as a reaſon, that they have been the origin of many ancient wars; while they never venture to conteſt the importance of commerce, though rivers of blood have often been ſhed for a trifling advantage of this kind? Can thoſe to whom we may addreſs this queſtion, be

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ſo miſtaken in their judgment, as to compare a few pecuniary advantages, which one nation enjoys only at the expence of another, with thoſe bleſſings which are as precious as they are univerſal, and of which Religion is the origin and ſupport?

In ſhort, the moſt frivolous of all the arguments that are employed to attack religious opinions, are thoſe derived from certain errors and faults, of which the preſent age affords no example. Would we, whilſt a ſuperb edifice ſtood firm on its foundation, be perſuaded to level it with the ground, on hearing a recital of all the accidents its erection had occaſioned?

Let us then look back with regret, on that period of hiſtory, in which Religion was made the pretext of war and cruelty; and let us oppoſe to that ſpirit of intolerance, and thoſe ſanguinary ſcenes, all the force of our reaſon, and all the inſtructions of that Religion itſelf, by which they pretend to be guided in their blind zeal. But, far from laying aſide the reſpect we owe to thoſe ſalutary opinions which men have abuſed, Let us take the advantage of experience, as a new defence againſt the deviations of our imagination, and the ſallies of our paſſions *.

CHAP.

* I might have enlarged this chapter; but I intend to make ſome general reflections on intolerance, in another part of this work.

CHAP. IX.

Another Objection examined. The Sabbath.

IT is not my intention to diſcuſs the various opinions which have been advanced with regard to particular parts of public worſhip; nor do I think it neceſſary to enter into the difficulties oppoſed to ſome dogmatic notions, which may be thought eſſential by ſome, and conſidered as indifferent by others. I mean not to compoſe a treatiſe of controverſial theology; much leſs do I wiſh to oppoſe the doctrines of one Church to thoſe of another. All of them connect morality with the commands of a Supreme Being: All of them conſider public worſhip as the reſpectful expreſſion of love and gratitude towards the Sovereign Author of Nature. Therefore, thoſe who may think, that they perceive ſome defects in the ſyſtem or form of worſhip adopted in a nation, ought not to urge that as an objection againſt the utility of Religious Opinions; ſince the reflections which have been here made on the Importance of theſe Opinions, may be applied equally to the doctrines of all countries, and the principles of every ſect.

I ſhall, then, notice only one difficulty, which equally concerns all the different Religions of Europe.

The eſtabliſhment of public worſhip, and the neceſſity of ſetting apart, at leaſt, one day every week, occaſions, ſay the oppoſers of Religion, a too frequent ſuſpenſion of labour; and this injures the ſtate, by diminiſhing the reſources of the people.

It may be firſt obſerved, that ſuch an objection appears very trivial, if compared with the great advantages which men derive from religious principles. An increaſe of wealth can never ſtand in competition with order, morality, and happineſs. But I will further endeavour to prove, That a day of reſt, devoted to public worſhip, cannot injure the political ſtrength of a country; and that, ſo far from being contrary to the intereſts of the people, it protects and favours them. Such intereſts ever hold the firſt place in my heart; and I ſhall, therefore, begin by demonſtrating, in a few words, the truth of this laſt propoſition.

It would be a miſtake to think, that in a given ſpace of time, ſuch men as are, by their lot, conſtrained to live by the labour of their hands, might better their ſituation, were they not obliged, by the precepts of Religion, to reſt from labour one day in every week.

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The more clearly to perceive this truth, let us examine what is the preſent ſtandard by which the rate of wages is fixed: It conſiſts not in an exact proportion between labour and its reward. Indeed, were we to conſult only reaſon and equity, I believe no one would venture to ſay, that the moſt ſcanty neceſſaries of life, are the juſt price of fatiguing and painful labour, which commences at the dawn, and ends not till the ſetting of the ſun; nor would any one maintain, that in the midſt of his enjoyments, and in the boſom of luxurious idleneſs, the rich man ought not to grant any other recompenſe to thoſe who ſacrifice their time and ſtrength, to increaſe his revenue, and multiply his enjoyments. The wages of the commonalty have not then been fixed by principles of reaſoning and reflection: They ſeem to depend on a contract of force and reſtraint,—a yoke impoſed by the powerful, to which the weak muſt ſubmit. Soon would the poſſeſſor of a vaſt domain ſee all his riches vaniſh, did not induſtrious labourers annually cultivate his fields, and bear into his ſtorehouſe the fruits of their toil. But as the number of men without property is immenſe, their own aſſent, and the preſſing neceſſity they feel of labouring for a ſubſiſtence, oblige them to receive the law from him who can, in the boſom of eaſe, wait quietly for their ſervices. And it reſults from this habitual dependence of the poor on the rich,

that the wages of the labourers are conſtantly reduced to the moſt ſcanty allowance, that is to ſay, what is barely ſufficient to ſatisfy, from day to day, their indiſpenſable wants.

This ſyſtem being ſettled, if it were poſſible, that, by a revolution in our nature, men could live and preſerve their ſtrength, without allotting every day ſome hours to repoſe and ſleep, it is certain beyond doubt, that the work of twenty hours, would be required for the ſame wages now granted for that of twelve.

Now, by a ſimilar hypotheſis, were a revolution of morals to be introduced, and were labourers permitted to work on the ſeventh day; it is certain, that in a little time, the labour of the ſeven days would be required of them, at the ſame rate now paid for that of ſix. And this reduction to the ſtandard would take place by the gradual diminution of the daily wages. That claſs of ſociety, ſo attentive to its own intereſt, which has regulated the preſent wages, not according to reaſon and equity, but according to the neceſſities of the labourers, would quickly diſcern, that when a day more was paid for, the people could bear a diminution of the ſeventh part of their wages, and ſtill remain in their former ſtate. Thus, though before the change had thoroughly taken place, all thoſe who live by labour, would think they had acquired a new reſource, yet they would very ſoon find themſelves

ſelves reduced to their former condition: For the relations of ſocial order, are ſubjected to laws, ſimilar, in ſome reſpects, to thoſe which eſtabliſh an equilibrium in nature, where every thing is combined, ranked or placed according to the immutable law of the proportion of force.

Thus, men without property, after being for ſome time deceived, would at laſt find that they had only got an increaſe of work by the abolition of the Sabbath. As this truth, however, does not naturally appear evident to the mind, we ought to conſider that Religion has done an eſſential ſervice, in having ſecured the moſt numerous claſs of men from a degree of oppreſſion, on which they would have blindly ruſhed, if they had been at liberty to make a choice.

The daily labour of men of that claſs, often ſurpaſſes the reaſonable meaſure of their ſtrength, and haſtens the days of decrepitude. It was therefore abſolutely neceſſary, that the cuſtomary courſe of theſe labours ſhould be for a time ſuſpended: But as the people, preſſed by wants of every kind, are ready to be ſeduced by the ſlighteſt appearance of advantage, it was alſo neceſſary to their happineſs, that the interruption of their fatigues, being fixed by a religious duty, ſhould not appear to them the voluntary ſacrifice of fortune, and ſhould not become the cauſe of regret. In ſhort, they are pleaſed when they think of thoſe days of reſt, which pro-

duce a little alteration in their manner of living. That alteration is requiſite to preſerve them from being oppreſſed by a continual train and repetition of the ſame occupations. Thus, were it to be artfully inſinuated, that the people are not ſo comfortable on the Sabbath, as during the other days of the week, it would be at leaſt true, that the latter are ſoftened by the expectation of the former; but there are people ſo very wretched, and ſo bounded in their deſires, that the moſt trifling variety is a ſubſtitute for hope. In my opinion, it muſt cheer the hearts of the common people, to think of their being once a-week dreſſed like their ſuperiors; when they are abſolute maſters of their time, and can thus ſometimes ſay,—I alſo am free *.

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* Theſe various reflections are very neceſſary in the place where I live, ſince labourers have, of late, been allowed to work at Paris on Sunday. We ſee this publicly practiſed at the new bridge now building over the Seine; as if a work of mere convenience were in ſuch haſte, that the laws ſhould be diſpenſed with to accelerate its execution. The workmen, ſay ſome people, are glad to gain a day every week:—Undoubtedly, while they only ſee the preſent inſtant, they have reaſon to think ſo; but it is the duty of Government, to conſider, in a more comprehenſive manner, the intereſt of that part of ſociety, whoſe views are always very narrow and imperfect. The Church ſhould alſo examine, whether the ſudden alteration of ſo ancient a practice, may not give riſe to an idea, that the ſpirit of Religion is on the decline. The nations where this ſpirit is beſt preſerved, have always the greateſt regard to the Sabbath.

I come now to examine the ſecond propoſition which I have mentioned.

You have clearly ſhewn, ſome will ſay, that an increaſe of working days, would occaſion a reduction of the price of labour; we are therefore entitled to aſk, If this reſult would not favour commerce, and contribute, in ſome reſpect, to increaſe the political ſtrength of the nation? We may, no doubt, conſider the diminution of the reward of induſtry, under this point of view; but political ſtrength being always a relative idea, and derived from a compariſon with other ſtates, this ſtrength can never be augmented or diminiſhed by a circumſtance common to all the countries of Europe. Were any nation, from barbarous ambition, to aboliſh the day of reſt eſtabliſhed by Religion, that abolition might probably procure it a degree of ſuperiority, if it was the only country which had adopted ſuch a change; but as ſoon as other Sovereigns followed the example, the ancient proportions, which regulate the commercial intereſts of nations, would again take place. However, ſuch arguments ought to convince us, that ſome countries, where the intervals of inaction occur oftener, are neceſſarily under a political diſadvantage, with regard to others, where Sunday, and a few ſolemn feaſts, are the only days of reſt preſcribed by government.

We may conclude from theſe obſervations, that inſtead of finding fault with Religion for appointing a day of reſt, devoted every week to public worſhip, we ought to acknowledge with pleaſure, that ſuch an inſtitution is an act of benevolence, extended to the moſt numerous claſs of inhabitants of the earth, the moſt deſerving our conſideration and protection;—from whom we require ſo much, and to whom we return ſo little;—that unfortunate claſs, of whoſe youth and manhood the rich avail themſelves, but whom they too often abandon at that period, when, their ſtrength being exhauſted, they can only employ prayers and tears, as a defence againſt wretchedneſs.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Obſervation on a particular Circumſtance of Public Worſhip.

IT is not enough, that the rulers of a nation be perſuaded of the influence of religious ſentiments on the morals and happineſs of men; they ought to uſe proper means, to maintain their ſalutary operation; and of courſe, every part of public worſhip becomes of the greateſt importance. Educated in a religion, thought by ſome to approach nearer the original principles of Chriſtianity, but which has adopted ſeveral doctrines, by no means conſonant with the Catholic faith, it would be imprudent for me to enter on any of the points in which the two Churches differ. Were I to do ſo, no good could reſult from it, ſo much are we diſpoſed to refer to early prejudices, thoſe ideas which are connected with our intimate feelings and ſentiments. We wiſh to judge from a general glance; and though this method indulges our indolence, it often leads us aſide from the truth. I am of opinion,

opinion, however, that the minds of the people are ſufficiently enlightened, to permit me to adviſe the Rulers of both Church and State, to examine attentively, If it is not full time to make more uſe of the vulgar tongue; and, If we are not warned, by the preſent depravity of morals, to alter the manner of performing divine ſervice in this reſpect.

It is only during an interval of the grand maſs, that the prieſt addreſſes to the country people, ſome words of exhortation in their own language. It was natural to conſider this as the moment moſt proper to diſpoſe the mind to reſpect and attention. But perhaps the pomp of an auguſt ceremony, by ſtrongly attracting the imagination, withdraws the attention of the ignorant rabble from the importance of other parts of divine worſhip. And it frequently happens, in country places, that many people go out of church during the ſermon, and return at the moment of conſecration.

I think that public prayers ſhould always be in the vulgar tongue; and they might eaſily be rendered intereſting and affecting; for no kind of religious diſcourſe can more ſympathiſe with human weakneſs; and as, by prayer, our wants and anxieties raiſe us towards the Supreme Being, we might thus make choice of the beſt of all bands to win the multitude.

I muſt obſerve alſo, that part of the country people, at certain ſeaſons of the year, are only preſent at early maſs *, and then they are mere onlookers at a religious ceremony. And if the practice and liberty of working on Sunday were more extended, the inhabitants of the country, being entirely confined to the firſt maſs, would hear neither prayers nor inſtructive diſcourſes in their own language, during the whole year.

Certainly ſome alteration ought to be made in theſe religious inſtitutions, in order to make them ſerve more effectually to ſupport morality, and comfort the moſt numerous claſs of the human race. Country people, whoſe labour produces our wealth, ought to be taken care of with paternal anxiety. And ſince they are leſs expoſed to thoſe diſorderly paſſions, which are ſo prevalent in a metropolis,—ſince mild and prudent means ſuffice to maintain them in the habit of duty,—both the Rulers of Church and State are, in ſome meaſure, anſwerable for the corruption of their manners and diſpoſitions.

* This maſs is commonly called *Low Maſs*.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

That the idea of the exiſtence of a GOD *is, alone, a ſufficient ſupport of Morality.*

HAVING ſhown that morality needs a ſupernatural ſupport, it may be expected that I ſhould explain the intimate relation which unites Religion with the obſervance of order, and the love of virtue. In order to inveſtigate this important truth, I ſhall follow that ſimple and natural train of ſentiments, which guide the human mind in every climate and country under heaven.

It is evident, that all moral legiſlation, and the entire ſyſtem of our duties, may be eaſily united to the ſimple belief of a God.

How inſignificant would the univerſe have appeared, notwithſtanding its magnificence and immenſity, had not its Supreme Author peopled it with intelligent beings, capable of contemplating ſo many wonders, and of deriving happineſs from them? But the faculties with which we are endowed,—our conſciouſneſs of poſſeſſing them,

them, and our liberty to act, all announce to us, that we are united to a grand combination, and we have a part to perform on the vaſt ſtage of the world.

A ſmall degree of reaſon, reſembling the inſtinct of inferior animals, would have been ſufficient for enabling us to take care of the body, and for concentrating us in ourſelves: More would have been unneceſſary for ſuch a narrow purpoſe. Thus, when I conſider that the mind is ſuſceptible of continual improvement,—when I ſee that men enjoy the power of aſſiſting each other, and of communicating their ideas,—when I fix my attention on our ſocial diſpoſitions, and on all the relative qualities which compoſe our nature; I cannot help thinking, that we have a plan of conduct to follow towards others, and that, in our journey through life, we muſt be circumſpect, having many obſtacles to conquer, as well as ſacrifices to make, and obligations to fulfil.

Men ſeem, then, to be led on to morality by the beſt gifts of nature, and by all the nobleſt principles of their conſtitution. But it is worthy of our notice, as a ſingular concurrence, that their wants and their weakneſſes are ſo directed as to contribute to the very ſame end.

What emotions do I feel, when I reflect on the imperious laws to which I am at preſent obliged to ſubmit, and, at the ſame time, recollect

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the grandeur and magnificence which I have witneſſed? Struck with this contraſt, I continually raiſe my ſoul towards the Sovereign Director of events; and, urged by inſtinct, as well as by rational ſentiments, I addreſs my prayers to Him alone. The unfortunate, when they obſerve how little would be ſufficient to guard them from impending dangers, and relieve them from preſent pain, and when they contemplate ſo many wonders beyond their comprehenſion, are led to implore the commiſeration of Him whoſe infinite power is every where evident. But ſhall I imagine that the Supreme Being is only beneficent to me, and that I alone am worthy of his notice and protection? While mankind, my fellow creatures, partake of the ſame proſpects and hopes with me, how ſhall I venture to ſeek protection from thoſe evils which I myſelf would do to others? How ſhall I ſolicit the bleſſing of Heaven on my undertakings, whilſt I endeavour unjuſtly to thwart the proſperity of others? How ſhould I wiſh to be ſet free from the yoke which oppreſſes me, whilſt I exerciſe the moſt tyrannical inſolence towards my inferiors? Thus preſent diſcontent,—the fear of futurity,—anxiety cauſed by misfortunes, and whatever ſentiments tend to diſturb ſocial order, aſſume another character, or are at leaſt ſenſibly modified, when men are led by their ſufferings to elevate their wiſhes to God,

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but dare not do it with a heart polluted with criminal intentions.

Beſides *Prayer*, there is another way of communication with the Supreme Being, which leads to Moral Virtue: It is the ſentiment of *Gratitude*. A man who is convinced of the exiſtence of an Infinite Sovereign Power, and who gladly connects his ſucceſs and happineſs with the divine protection, feels, at the ſame time, a deſire to expreſs his gratitude. Unable to do any thing for Him who beſtows all, he endeavours to form an idea of the perfections of the Supreme Being, in order to comprehend the ſyſtem of conduct moſt conformable to the attributes of that All Perfect Model. What thoughts, what emotions, at once agitate our ſouls, when we contemplate the univerſe! We view with the deepeſt admiration, that magnificent harmony, which is the incomprehenſible reſult of an innumerable multitude of various powers and qualities. Struck with this great whole, in which we perceive an agreement ſo perfect, we cannot avoid conſidering the order we diſcover, as a diſtinct mark of the wiſdom and deſign of the Creator: Neither can we doubt that we render Him due homage, when we make uſe of the free intelligence with which he has endowed us. Then, in modelling the ſtructure of ſociety, a work which has been entruſted to us, we ſhould endeavour to take into view, thoſe ideas of wiſ-

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dom and proportion, of which all nature exhibits a great example: Then, in eſtabliſhing the relations which unite mankind, we ſhould carefully ſtudy the laws of moral order; and we would find them all founded on that reciprocation of duties, which ſubjects all our jarring perſonal intereſts to a regular movement. In ſhort, the idea of a God, Creator, Regenerator, and Preſerver of the univerſe by invariable laws, and by a ſucceſſion of the ſame cauſes and effects, ſeems to point out a univerſal morality,—which, like the unknown ſprings which actuate the natural world, may be, as it were, the neceſſary tie of this ſucceſſion of intelligent beings, who, always poſſeſſed of the ſame paſſions, paſs and repaſs on the earth,—to ſeek after, or to ſhun,—to aſſiſt, or to hurt each other, according to the degree of their ſocial union, and according to the wiſdom or impropriety of the principles which direct their opinions.

The attentive ſtudy of human nature ought to confirm us in the ſentiments here advanced. When we conſider the prodigious difference which exiſts among the minds and characters of men, and when we reflect how far this difference may be carried, by the degree of improvement of which ſome are ſuſceptible,—we cannot contemplate ſuch a conſtitution, without being induced to think that the counterpoiſe of theſe extraordinary means of force and uſurpation muſt

proceed

proceed from reaſon,—from that ſingular authority which alone can eſtabliſh among mankind the relations of juſtice and propriety, and render them capable of maintaining an equilibrium amidſt ſo many diſparities. Thus, reſpect for morality ſeems evidently to be a part of the general plan and primitive idea of the Supreme Diſpoſer of the univerſe. What happineſs then muſt we find in a perſuaſion, that the cultivation of virtue, and the obſervance of order, afford the means of pleaſing our Divine Benefactor! It is by that alone, we can hope to concur, however feebly, in the execution of his grand deſigns. Surrounded with ſo many bleſſings, and ſo many ſigns of a particular protection, How highly ought we to value this means of communication with the Sovereign Author of our exiſtence? Thus then, the homage of gratitude and adoration which we render to the Deity, leads us to reſpect the laws of morality; and this ſentiment, in its turn, continually maintains in our minds, the idea of a Supreme Being.

Independent of the reflections which have been juſt offered, morality, conſidered in all its extent, requires to be ſtrengthened by that diſpoſition of the ſoul, which intereſts us in the happineſs of others; and it is in one of the moſt glorious perfections of the Deity, that we find the firſt model of this precious ſentiment. We muſt either aſſert that our exiſtence proceeds from no

cauſe, or admit that we owe it to the *goodneſs* of a Supreme Being. Life, ſome will ſay, is only a mixture of pains and pleaſures: But we ought candidly to allow, that thoſe moments, in which life appears no benefit, do very ſeldom occur. In Youth, that period which ſo many never ſurpaſs, exiſtence is conſidered as the greateſt of all bleſſings. The other ſeaſons of life offer pleaſures, which, though leſs animated, agree better with the progreſs of our underſtanding, and the increaſe of our experience.

The oppoſers of Religion, in order to diveſt us of gratitude, ſometimes aſk, Who would accept of life, on condition of running over the ſame career a ſecond time, and returning ſtep by ſtep, in the ſame track? But in anſwering this queſtion, we cannot ſet a juſt value on the benefits which we have received; for when we take a retroſpective view of life, we ſee it ſtripped of its two principal ornaments, *curioſity* and *hope*. It was not, however, in this ſtate, that it was received and enjoyed by us.

Perhaps, our fancy cannot replace us in that ſituation where imagination conſtituted our pleaſure; its effect is too ſlight to make an impreſſion on the memory. But ſtill we may be convinced that a degree of happineſs is attached to our exiſtence, becauſe we look forward with terror to the moment when we ſhall be forced to renounce it. Now, as this happineſs is compoſed

poſed not only of preſent pleaſures, but alſo of all thoſe which we anticipate, we cannot judge properly of the value of life, when this future proſpect is only preſented to us under the form of the paſt: For we cannot duly appreciate, in our languiſhing recollection, that which we loved in the moment of hope.

Phyſical evils are neither the end, nor the condition of our nature: They are accidental to it. The happineſs of infancy, which diſplays the work of the Deity in its primitive purity, evidently points out the goodneſs of a Supreme Being; and how can we doubt, that we owe our origin to a benevolent deſign, ſince a deſire of happineſs has been given us, to ſerve as the motive of all our actions? Alas! we would have had a better opinion of life, had we not corrupted its pleaſures by artificial ſentiments, which we have ſubſtituted inſtead of nature,—had we not overlooked ſo many realities, and devoted ourſelves to the purſuits of pride and vanity; had we not, inſtead of contributing to each others happineſs, been principally occupied in making others ſubmit to us! Some troubles, no doubt, are blended with our wondrous exiſtence; but from what a multitude of others are we exempted! Let us then cheriſh thoſe exalted ſentiments which elevate the mind, and fortify us againſt envy and diſcontent.

It is only from the conſideration of detached events, and in peculiar circumſtances, that we can raiſe any doubts about the goodneſs of God; but his univerſal goodneſs is ever diſcoverable, when we connect the particulars which give us pain, with that great whole of which they are a part. We then find that the misfortunes with which we are ſo much offended, are a ſimple appendage to a ſyſtem, where all the characters of a beneficent intelligence may be evidently traced. We ought, therefore, carefully to look into the intentions of the Author of Nature, in this vaſt ſtructure, in which His power and wiſdom are every where diſplayed; and ſuch contemplations will always lead us to ſentiments of reſpect and gratitude. This ſimple idea is very extenſive in its application. Above all, it affords us conſolation under the afflictions incident to human life. He who thinks in this manner, can ſay to himſelf: 'The tranſitory evil to which I am ſubjected, is perhaps one of the inevitable effects of this univerſal harmony,—the moſt noble and the moſt extenſive of all conceptions. Thus, in the moments when I bewail my fate, I ought not to think myſelf forſaken; I ought not to accuſe Him, whoſe infinite wiſdom is preſent to my view,—Him, whoſe general laws I have ſo often admired, as the certain expreſſion of real goodneſs.'

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It is in vain, ſome will ſay, to call our attention to theſe conſiderations: We only remark, that our happineſs in this world, is, at leaſt, greatly inferior to the degree of felicity which our imagination can eaſily repreſent; and we cannot perceive, in ſuch an arrangement, that union of perfections, which ought to be the attribute of a Supreme Being.

This objection is preſented under various forms by the oppoſers of Religion: From it they have drawn conſequences, ſometimes againſt the goodneſs of God, and ſometimes againſt his power, his wiſdom and juſtice. It would be neceſſary, in order to reſolve ſuch difficulties, that we ſhould be capable to form an idea of the perfections of an infinite Being: But in all our attempts, we only carry to the extreme, all the qualities which are within the reach of our conception; but perfection, in the works of the Creator, probably conſiſts in a kind of gradation and harmony, the ſecret of which we can neither comprehend nor penetrate. We ought alſo to be very cautious of our procedure, while we endeavour to judge of the eſſence of the Deity; becauſe, in confining ourſelves ſolely to reconcile his ſovereign power with his perfect goodneſs, we ſhould be unable to fix the boundary where theſe two properties will be in an equilibrium: For after having exhauſted every ſuppoſition, we might ſtill aſk, Why the number of animated beings

ſuſceptible of happineſs, is not more extended? Why every grain of ſand is not one of thoſe beings? or in ſhort, Why each grain does not contain a number of ſuch beings, equal to that infinite diviſibility, of which we can form an idea? Thus, in arguing on infinite power, paſſing from one extreme to another, the leaſt inanimated particle of matter, the leaſt void in nature, would appear a boundary to the goodneſs of the Supreme Being. We thus ſee, how far we might wander, were we to abandon the ſimple principles of common ſenſe, in order to follow the vague excurſions of metaphyſical reſearches.

Were no other proof to be found, I think that the *power* of God would be ſufficient to demonſtrate his *goodneſs*: For this power informs us every inſtant, that if the ſupreme Ruler of the world had intended that animated beings ſhould be miſerable, he would have had means as rapid as numerous to fulfil this intention. He needed not to have created worlds, and clothed them with ſuch beauty and magnificence: A terrific gulph, and eternal darkneſs, would have been ſufficient to crowd together thoſe unfortunate beings, and make them feel their miſery. Let us fly from thoſe gloomy thoughts, and let us cheriſh in our hearts, a juſt emotion of gratitude. Thus we ſhall be eager to render homage to that indelible character of love and goodneſs, which we ſee ſtamped on all nature. An unknown power

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opens our eyes to the light, and permits us to view the wonders of the univerſe: It awakens in us thoſe delightful ſenſations, which firſt make us feel the charm of life: It enriches us with that intellectual gift, which, as it were, aſſembles around us paſt ages and the time to come: It confers on us, at an early period, an empire, by inveſting us with theſe two ſublime faculties, *will* and *liberty*. In ſhort, it renders us ſenſible to the refined pleaſure of loving and being beloved; and when, by the effect of a general plan which ſurpaſſes our comprehenſion, it ſcatters here and there ſome troubles in the path of life, it ſeems willing to ſoften them, by ſhowing us the future through the enchanting veil of imagination and hope. Could it then be with indifference, and without real goodneſs, that this wonderful ſyſtem has been conceived, and preſerved by ſo many ſuperb demonſtrations of wiſdom and power? What ſhould we be in the ſight of the ETERNAL, if he did not love us? We have not adorned his majeſtic univerſe, nor lent to the dawn its magnificent colours: Neither have we clothed the earth with beautiful verdure, nor bid the celeſtial bodies revolve in the immenſe expanſe: We have not been admitted to the counſels of the Almighty, nor aided him by our wiſdom;—we ſhould thus be nothing in His eyes, were He indifferent to our gratitude,

and were He to take no pleaſure in the happineſs of His creatures.

Were we even to turn our attention from ſo many ſtriking proofs of the goodneſs of God,—were they to be effaced from our memory, we ſhould ſtill find in the receſſes of our heart, ſufficient evidence of this comfortable truth: We ſhould perceive that we ourſelves are good and affectionate when not perverted by paſſion; and we ſhould be led to think, that ſuch an inclination in beings who have received every thing from their Creator, and can do nothing of themſelves, muſt neceſſarily be the ſeal of a Divine Author. In order to exalt this ſentiment, we muſt refer it continually to the idea of a Supreme Being: For there is, doubtleſs, a correſpondence, and, as it were, a reflected reſemblance, between our virtue, and the perfection of Him who is the origin of all that is good. Indeed, if we reſiſt not our natural emotions, we ſhall perceive, in thoſe very perfections, every thing that is neceſſary to excite us to worſhip and adoration; and, above all, whatever is needful to direct our moral conduct and principles.

I come now to examine ſome important objections; for why ſhould I fear to preſent them? Every prejudice in favour of peculiar ſyſtems or opinions ought to be laid aſide, in treating a ſubject on which ſo many have expatiated, and which is ſo highly intereſting to the whole human

man race. It is, however, allowable, in our ſearch after truth, that we deſire earneſtly to find it united to ſuch ſentiments as conſtitute our happineſs as individuals, and to thoſe principles which are the foundation of public order.

We admit, ſome may ſay, that there are many perfections peculiar to the Supreme Being, the ſtudy and knowledge of which ought to be the ſupport of the laws of morality; but one of the eſſential properties of the divine eſſence overturns the whole ſtructure,—to wit, infinite *preſcience*. For as God has a previous knowledge of what we are to do, it follows that all our actions are previouſly determined; and thus, man cannot be free. If ſuch be his condition, he deſerves neither praiſe nor cenſure: He has no means of pleaſing or diſpleaſing the Supreme Being; and the ideas of good and evil, of virtue and vice, are abſolutely chimerical. I ſhall at once make a very ſimple reply to this objection, but a very deciſive one. If, contrary to every evidence, you ſhould perſuade me, that there is an abſolute contradiction between the liberty of man and the preſcience of the Deity, yet the nature and extent of that preſcience remain very dubious: For, being forced to chooſe, I ſhould rather miſtruſt the judgment of my own mind, than an opinion founded on internal conviction. This intimate perſuaſion will render it ever impoſſible to convince men that they are not free.

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We can only attempt to overturn this belief by reaſoning: But reaſon being the commencement of art, and founded on a combination of reflections, this exterior means can never have power to eradicate a ſentiment that appears to be the firſt of which we are conſcious.

We ſoon arrive at the limits of our faculties, in the efforts which we make to acquire a juſt idea of the divine preſcience. We can very well ſuppoſe, that God foreſees with certainty, things about which we only conjecture indiſtinctly; and by enlarging, without end, the boundaries oppoſed to our mind, we can proportion, in our imagination, the knowledge of the Creator to the immenſity of ſpace, and to the infinity of time: But beyond theſe common and vague ideas we ſhall wander in all our ſpeculations. How is it poſſible that we, who know not even the nature of our own ſouls, ſhould be able to determine the nature of divine preſcience? How can we know if this preſcience be the effect of a rapid calculation of Him, who embraces, at one glance, the relations and effects of every moral and natural cauſe? How can we diſcern whether this preſcience in an Infinite Being is diſtinct from ſimple knowledge? How can we know, whether that Being, by a property beyond our conception, does not at once exiſt before and after events;—whether He is not, as it

it were, the intellectual Time,—before whoſe eternal and unchangeable exiſtence our diviſions of years and ages, totally diſappear?

It is evident from theſe conſiderations, that, on account of our extreme ignorance, we cannot accurately define divine preſcience. We muſt, therefore, examine whether this preſcience, conſidered in a general manner, is incompatible with the liberty of man.

This opinion, I think, ſhould not be adopted. Preſcience does not determine future events: For the mere knowledge of the future, makes not the future. Preſcience never can neceſſitate the actions of men; becauſe it does not change the natural order of things. But all future events are fixed, whether foreſeen or not: For conſtraint and liberty conduct equally to a poſitive term. Thus, all that will happen, is as immutable as that which is paſt; ſince the preſent was the future of yeſterday, and will be to-morrow the paſt. It is then certain, abſtractedly, that an event, whether foreſeen or not, will take place ſome time. But if liberty be not averſe to this inevitable certainty, How does it become ſo, becauſe there exiſts a Being who is acquainted previouſly with the preciſe nature of events? We may then juſtly conclude, that the knowledge of the future is no more an obſtruction to liberty, than the remembrance of the paſt; and prophecies, like hiſtories, are only recitals, whoſe

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place is not the ſame in the order of time; but having no influence on events, they cannot conſtrain the will, enſlave the ſentiments, nor ſubject man to the law of neceſſity.

It is, however, confeſſed, that if preſcience were founded on the poſſibility of calculating the actions of men, like the movements of an organized machine, liberty could not exiſt. But then it would not be preſcience which oppoſed our liberty,—it would be our nature, as mere automatons: For with ſuch a conſtitution we ſhould be without liberty, were the Supreme Being even to have no knowledge of futurity.

Some philoſophers vainly endeavour to convince us, that we are not free, by repreſenting that we neceſſarily ſubmit to the impulſe of various exterior objects; comprehending, among thoſe objects, every thing that is ſubtle in moral ideas, and uniting them under the general name of *motives*; and afterwards giving to theſe motives a phyſical force, which they pretend we are bound to obey. But in order to be free, Is it neceſſary, that we ſhould act without motives? Then would man be evidently a piece of mechaniſm. It is certain, that we are determined in all our actions by reaſon, taſte, or ſome cauſe of preference. But it is the mind which lays hold of theſe various conſiderations, and which weighs, compares and modifies them. The mind liſtens to the counſels of virtue, and replies to the lan-

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guage of our paſſions. In order to obtain light, the mind borrows from the memory the ſuccours of experience. The mind thus prepares, compoſes and improves all thoſe things which we term motives; and in conſequence of this intellectual labour, we determine our mode of action. There is too much order, unity and harmony in our thoughts, to allow us for a moment, to imagine that they are the mere effect of the exterior objects, the ideas of which are, without any regular arrangement, impreſſed on our brain. Until we are made acquainted with the doctrines of chaos, we ſhould firmly believe that there exiſts every where the ſame unity and order: That there is a Power capable of reaſſembling every thing that is ſcattered, and uniting to one end all that is ſeemingly mixed without deſign.

While we are impelled to believe, that there is a maſter or ruler over our perceptions, and while we feel its influence, How is it poſſible to doubt, that it is our mind which acts? But by breaking looſe from its operations, we are ſtripped of our liberty, and ſuppoſe, at laſt, that our will is the neceſſary conſequence of exterior objects; as if it were the colours, and not the painter, that produced the picture. However, if we ſecure our mind from that ſlavery to which ſome wiſh to reduce it, our actions will no longer be

be merely ſubſervient to irreſiſtible emotions: For liberty of thought ſets us entirely free.

We ought to conſider our ſenſes as meſſengers, which bring to our mind new ſubjects of reflection: But they are ſo far ſubordinate to the ſublime part of our exiſtence, that they act only under its direction. Sometimes the ruling principle commands them to bring repreſentations of the beauties of nature,—to examine aſſiduouſly the regiſters of the human mind,—to take the ruler and compaſs, and render an exact account of the things it deſires to know with preciſion. Sometimes it teaches them how to acquire more power; and when it wiſhes to addreſs poſterity, it orders them to perpetuate in indelible characters, all that it has maturely combined,—all that it has diſcovered,—and all it hopes to add to the treaſures of our knowledge. Is not then the ſoul the maſter, rather than the ſlave of our ſenſes, or the blind ſport of their caprice?

There is another obſervation, that appears a contraſt to the abſolute empire which ſome wiſh to grant to exterior objects over the powers of the ſoul. It is, That amid the ſilence of meditation, the action of our mind is not at all interrupted. We experience, that we have the power of recalling paſt ideas; and that we can connect thoſe ideas with the proſpect of the future, and with the various imaginary circumſtances our fancy may ſuggeſt. Our reflection is then the

the *reſult*, but not the *work* of thoſe exterior objects we are acquainted with. Theſe two words, *work* and *reſult*, which, in ſome acceptations, have a great reſemblance, have here very different meanings. By confounding them, ſome perſons have endeavoured to raiſe an objection againſt the exiſtence of our liberty.—We cannot form any judgment without previouſly diſcuſſing every argument proper to throw light on the ſubject: The *reſult* of ſuch enquiries determines our will; but theſe enquiries themſelves are the *work* of our mind.

In ſhort, all the degrees which lead to the end of our intellectual reſearches, are ſimple antecedents, and not abſolute motives. There is, in the operations of our mind, as in every thing ſubject to change, a train of cauſes and effects; but this concatenation does not characteriſe neceſſity more than liberty.

By thus reſtoring to the ſoul, its original dignity, is it not evident, that we approach nearer to nature, than by adopting thoſe ſyſtems and explications which aſſimilate our intellectual faculties to the regular vibrations of a pendulum? or would it be better to compare them to thoſe little balls that fly out of their niches, to ſtrike our brain, which, by its various ramifications, produces a certain ſhock that impels our will? In all this, I only diſcover puerile figures, put in the place of thoſe terms, that indicate, at leaſt,

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by their abſtraction, the indefinite extent, and the important nature of the ideas which they repreſent. It is eaſy to call a *motive*, a little moving ball; and to call *uncertainty* or *repentance*, the combat of two of theſe little balls, till the arrival of a third forms a determination. It is eaſy to ſay, that the concurrence of many ſuch balls towards the ſame point, excites in us an impetuous paſſion: But who ſees not, that, after having endeavoured to debaſe the functions of the mind by theſe wretched compariſons, the difficulty remains undiminiſhed?

Since our reſearches and meditations on the exiſtence and nature of our liberty preſent us only with impenetrable clouds and obſcurity, Is it not ſtrange, that amidſt this darkneſs, we ſhould reject all the information of our inſtinctive ſentiments, which alone can clearly explain every thing that we ſeek in vain to diſcover by other means? What would we ſay of a man born blind, who would not be directed by the voice? How much better are we inſtructed in the conſtitution of our nature by our feelings, than by metaphyſical arguments! Our feelings ſeem to be blended with the original eſſence of the ſoul; and we ought to conſider them, in ſome meaſure, as a ſally of that incomprehenſible part of our nature, whoſe myſteries we cannot penetrate. Such inſtruction, which comes to us from a divine hand, is more deſerving of confi-

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dence than the interpretation of men. There are ſecrets which philoſophers try in vain to explain; all their endeavours are ineffectual to repreſent by compariſon, that which is peculiar, and without reſemblance.

One would think that nature, aware of the falſe reaſoning which might miſlead us, had purpoſely beſtowed an inward conviction of our free will, by compoſing our natural life of two diſtinct movements: One depending on a neceſſity, whoſe laws we are not acquainted with, and cannot oppoſe; the other entirely ſubject to the government of our reaſon. Such a compariſon would be ſufficient to convince us, if we ſought merely for the truth.

Spinoſa, in order to make us diſtruſt the information we derive from our intuitive perceptions, ſaid, That were a weathercock, while it is the mere plaything of the winds, capable of volition in its various motions, it might, for that reaſon, imagine that it was the cauſe of its own movement. What ſignifies ſuch an argument, unleſs it were to prove, that it is poſſible to ſuppoſe a fiction ſo perfect, that it might ſeem equivalent to a reality? But, let me aſk, By what ſtrange and unaccountable deſign of an Intelligent Being, or even, by what fortuitous coincidence in blind nature, is it, That man comes to have his *will* and *actions*, at every moment, preciſely conformable, if no real correſpondence exiſts between them?

We may oppoſe another argument to the hypotheſis of Spinoſa, by which it is effectually overturned; that is, If on the one hand, the moſt apparent liberty can be ſuppoſed to be only an illuſion, by a particular concurrence of our will with an ordained action, it is, on the other hand, inconteſtible, that were we only endeavouring to ſuppoſe the exiſtence, or ſimple poſſibility, of a free will, we could not form an idea of it, different from that which we actually enjoy. Even the liberty of God himſelf does not appear to our thoughts under any other form. It is eſſential to remark, That while we contemplate our faculties, we can imagine, with eaſe, a ſuperior degree of intelligence, of knowledge, of memory, of foreſight, and of every other property of our underſtanding. Our *liberty* is the only circumſtance of our nature, to which imagination can add nothing.

I ſhall not purſue all the ſubtile arguments that have been advanced on the ſubject of liberty: Becauſe I wiſh to be univerſally uſeful, and I do not addreſs myſelf to ſome men, but to all. I ſhall therefore always dwell on ſuch principal reflections as appear to me ſufficient to influence the opinion of thoſe who poſſeſs a ſound underſtanding, and have a tendency to fix the attention on the important truths, which are the ſureſt foundation of public happineſs. Vanity and oſtentation may induce us to follow a

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queſtion to its utmoſt limits, and to delight in ſpinning it out with much nicety; for vanity, when applied to deep inveſtigations, often becomes, itſelf, the greateſt ſubtility.

Let us now examine other arguments uſed to combat thoſe principles which we have endeavoured to eſtabliſh. Some will ſay, 'In vain do 'we attempt to prove that the belief of the exiſt-'ence of a God is a ſufficient ſupport to the laws 'of morality; All this ſyſtem will fall to pieces, 'if we are not informed, at the ſame time, in 'what manner this God rewards and puniſhes.'

I ſhall at firſt obſerve, that ſuch an objection can never make a deep impreſſion, unleſs it be connected in our minds with ſome doubt of the exiſtence of a Supreme Being;—a queſtion of which I ſhall not yet treat. For, ſuppoſing an internal conviction of this great truth, and that the idea of a God is preſent to our thoughts in all its force, I aſk, Whether, in order to pleaſe Him, we ſhould require to know preciſely the period when we could perceive diſtinct ſigns of His approbation and beneficence? I alſo aſk, Whether, to avoid incurring His diſpleaſure, it would be equally neceſſary for us to know how, and in what manner, He would puniſh us? Certainly not: For, on taking a comprehenſive view of the rewards and puniſhments that may

proceed from a Supreme Being,—ſtruck with His grandeur, and aſtoniſhed by His power, the awful thought of infinity would obtrude; and this tremendous idea would regulate our ſentiments, and fix the principles of our conduct. We ſhould beware how we propoſe conditions to Him who has brought us from nothing; and we ſhould wait with reſpect, for the moment, when, in His profound wiſdom, He may think proper to make us better acquainted with His attributes. One man may ſay to another, Secure me the reward of my ſervices, I demand it on ſuch a day, at ſuch an hour. They barter things of equal value, and they exerciſe this traffic during a ſhort ſpace of time; but in the intercourſe of man with the Deity, what an interval! what infinite diſparity!—The creature and the Creator,—the offſpring of duſt and the Source of Life,—a ſhort moment and Eternity,—an imperceptible atom and the Infinite Being, who fills the whole Univerſe! Our underſtanding is overpowered by this contraſt. How then ſhould we adapt to ſuch diſproportions, the rules and notions which we have introduced into our narrow tranſactions and trivial concerns? You require, that in order to feel the deſire of pleaſing the Supreme Being, He ſhould every moment beſtow gifts on thoſe, who by their ſentiments and actions appear worthy of His goodneſs: And to inſpire the fear of offending Him, you wiſh that

that without delay, He would let his vengeance cruſh the wicked. Certainly you would be ſcrupulous obſervers of His will on ſuch conditions; for leſs ſtable hopes and fears detain you ſervilely near a Monarch: And I may venture to ſay, that you would be equally attentive to the Ruler of the World, if, in order to reward or puniſh you, He were to alter the laws of nature.

'But we do not ſee,' you may add, 'that God 'interferes in any manner to direct things here 'below:'—You do not ſee it! but do you more clearly diſcover the power which gives life and motion to all nature? It is not becauſe ſuch a power does not exiſt, but becauſe it is above the reach of your mind. What ſhall we ſay to the man who rejects the belief of a God? Without that guide all our ideas are wandering, and have no other connection but that of a bewildered imagination. But if you grant that the world had an origin,—if you ſuppoſe a God, Creator and Preſerver, what arguments could you uſe to convince us, that that God has no relation to us: That He does not take notice of intelligent beings, and that He is thus ſeparated from the offspring of His love and intelligence? It may be further added, 'Vice is every where triumphant,—an honeſt man often languiſhes in deſpondency and obſcurity; and how can we reconcile this injuſtice with the idea of a Divine

'Providence?' We may, at once, deny the aſſertion, which forms the baſis of this reproach; at leaſt we may diſpute the inferences that are deduced from it. Theſe ideas of exaltation and abaſement, of ſplendour and obſcurity, are ſometimes very foreign to the internal ſentiments, which alone conſtitute happineſs and miſery. For my part, I am perſuaded, that if we take for a rule of compariſon, not ſome particular ſituations, or ſome uncommon events, but the whole tenor of life, and the generality of men, we ſhall then find, that the moſt conſtant ſatisfaction attends thoſe minds which are filled with a mild piety, firm and rational, ſuch as the pure idea of the Deity ought to inſpire. I am equally perſuaded, that virtue, united to this piety, which ſoftens every action of ſelf-denial, is the ſafeſt guide in the path of life. Perhaps, ignorant as we are of our nature and deſtination, it is not our intereſt, that uninterrupted rewards ſhould excite us to virtue: For if this virtue be our title and hope with God, for the preſent, and the time to come, we ought not to deſire that it ſhould degenerate into an evident calculation, and into a ſentiment reſembling convenience and ſelfiſhneſs. It would indeed be very difficult to give a proper definition of liberty, if, by the effect of rapid juſtice, a conſtant proportion of good and evil, accompanied every determination of our mind: We ſhould then morally, as well

as phyſically, be impelled by an imperious inſtinct, and the merit of our actions would be entirely deſtroyed.

Here, ſome may ſay, What imports our merit or demerit, if our life is only for an inſtant, and if nothing is to follow? The belief of the exiſtence of a God, without a *certainty* of the immortality of our Soul, cannot impoſe any obligation; and we do not perceive any real connection between theſe two ideas.

Undoubtedly, left to our own underſtanding, this word *certainty* is not made for us; at leaſt it is not applicable to our relation with the Deity, and to the judgment we form of His deſigns and will. We are too far removed from the Great Ruler of the univerſe, to comprehend His infinite deſigns. Thoſe things which He has covered with a veil, we can but obſcurely perceive, and thoſe which are hid in the depths of His wiſdom, we never can diſcover. But the more the God whom we adore is beyond our higheſt conceptions, the leſs have we a right to limit His perfections, in order to deny His power of prolonging our exiſtence beyond the narrow circle ſubmitted to our view; and I do not think any one can allege, that ſuch an act of the Deity, would be more wonderful or greater, than the creation of the world, or the formation of animated beings. The habit of obſerving a great

wonder may weaken our aſtoniſhment, but it changes not the nature of the object itſelf.

It is by reflection alone, that we are enabled to reach thoſe events, of which the future is ſtill the depoſitory. But ſince every thing around us, declares the greatneſs of the Supreme Being,—ſince the mind, in contemplation, approaches without terror the confines of infinity, why ſhould we miſtruſt what that magnificent union of Omnipotence and perfect Goodneſs may perform in favour of man? Why reject, as an abſurd confidence, the idea of another exiſtence? We ſee, without aſtoniſhment, the feeble chryſalis burſt through its tomb, and appear under a new form. We cannot by anticipation witneſs the perpetuity of our own intelligence; but its vaſt extent would appear to us, were we not familiarized with it, a more wonderful phenomenon than its duration.

In ſhort, Why ſhall I reſiſt the belief of the continuation of my exiſtence, ſince I am forced to give credit to my birth? There appears a greater diſtance between life and the nonentity which precedes it, than between life and its ſequel, or its renewal under another form. We are diſtinctly acquainted with the commencement of exiſtence; but we know death only by conjecture. We now enjoy the light and bleſſings brought into the world about two thouſand years ago, by a Heavenly Teacher. Can we

ſuppoſe,

ſuppoſe, that he himſelf was not impreſſed with the noble and virtuous ſentiments he ſo earneſtly recommended? I cannot tell why this contraſt makes an impreſſion on me; but it is among the number of thoſe ideas which readily occur to my mind when I reflect on this ſubject.

Another comfortable thought ſtill ſtrikes me: The natural order of the univerſe appears to me a finiſhed ſyſtem. We perceive a perfect regularity in the revolution of the heavenly bodies,—an invariable ſucceſſion in vegetable life,—an almoſt incredible preciſion in that immenſe quantity of volatile particles ſubjected to the laws of affinity; and we believe, with certainty, that every thing is in its right place,—that all the parts exactly fulfil their deſtination, in the grand ſyſtem of nature.

If we turn our attention to the multitude of beings inferior to man, we ſhall alſo diſcover, that their action is complete, and perfectly conformable to the faculties they are endowed with; ſince they are impelled by irreſiſtible inſtinct, to perform every thing neceſſary for their ſituation, and nothing more. Impreſſed with theſe ideas, and filled with admiration, at the general harmony, Have we not ground to preſume, that man who is, as it were, tranſported into infinite ſpace by his intelligence,—who is ever ſtruggling with the obſtacles oppoſed to the perfection at which he aims,—in ſhort, that man, the

moſt

moſt noble work of nature, only commences his exiſtence in this ſublunary ſtate? Since all that compoſes the material order of the univerſe, appears to us in ſuch admirable harmony, Ought we not to conclude, that the moral order in which we perceive many things vague and indeterminate, and which is connected with a ſyſtem more ſublime and aſtoniſhing than the other parts of creation, will one day be ultimately diſcloſed? This ſingular contraſt between the harmony of the phyſical, and the apparent confuſion of the moral world, ſeems to announce a time of equilibrium and completion: A time when we ſhall all diſcover the agreement of the moral arrangement with the wiſdom of the Creator, as we already perceive the wiſdom of His deſigns, in the perfect correſpondence of the innumerable bleſſings of nature, with all the various wants of man, and every other creature.

The grandeur of the human mind, is indeed, a vaſt ſubject of reflection. This marvellous conſtitution points out to us continually a deſign proportioned to ſo noble a conception. The ſoul needed not to be endowed with ſuch exalted faculties, to fulfil the limited plans and trivial purſuits of this ſhort life. Thus every thing authoriſes us to carry our views farther. Were I to ſee ſuch men as Columbus, Veſputius, or Vaſco de Gama in a ſhip, I would not ſuppoſe that they only intended to ſail continually about the coaſt.

Some

Some philoſophers, in order to deſtroy our hopes, aſſert, that the ſoul is material, and that we ſhould believe it to reſemble thoſe things which we ſee periſhing around us. But only the forms change; the vivifying force does not periſh: Perhaps, the ſoul reſembles that force, with this difference, that, as it is compoſed of memory, reflection and foreſight, it exiſts only by a ſeries of conſequences, which form the diſtinct attributes and particular character of its eſſence. It follows then, that it cannot be generaliſed, like the blind force which animates vegetation in a univerſal manner; but that every ſoul is, in ſome meaſure, a world to itſelf, and that it ought to preſerve ſeparately an identity of intereſt, and conſciouſneſs of preceding thoughts. Thus, in this ſyſtem, the body which diſtinguiſhes us in the eyes of others, is only the tranſitory habitation of that ſoul which is not to die,—of that ſoul, ſuſceptible of continual improvement, which, by a progreſs we can have no conception of, will probably approach inſenſibly to that magnificent period, when it will become more worthy of an intimate knowledge of the Author of Nature.

But, ſay the materialiſts, how can we conceive the action of the ſoul on our ſenſes without a point of contact? How can we conceive that contact without the idea of matter? Experience alone teaches us, that contact is neceſſary to produce motion; and without that previous knowledge,

ledge, the rapidity with which one body ſometimes ſtrikes againſt another, could only have repreſented to us the time neceſſary for their approach. However, ſince we have no metaphyſical knowledge of the cauſe of motion, and ſince, experience alone guides our judgment with reſpect to this, Why ſhould we reſiſt the idea, that we poſſeſs an internal faculty which acts of itſelf? The intimate feeling which we have of it, is ſurely an evidence worthy of credit. Beſides, we can never allege, that ſuch a property is oppoſite to the nature of things, ſince, if we adopt the ſyſtem of the creation of the world, this property may proceed, like all others, from the Divine Power; and if, on the contrary, we admit the irreligious opinion of the eternity of the univerſe, there muſt have been from eternity a general movement without impulſion, without exterior contact, or any outward cauſe whatever; and the action of our ſoul might be ſubject to the ſame laws.

The notion of a contact being neceſſary to effect a movement would never have occurred, had we not bounded our obſervation to the influence of our ideas on our determinations, and the influence of thoſe determinations on our phyſical being. In ſhort, the laws of attraction and repulſion are ſubject to great exceptions: Exceptions which may ſerve to ſupport the ſyſtem of the ſpirituality of the ſoul. May we not be allowed to

ſay,

ſay, that there exiſts a ſort of vacuum in the univerſe; ſince, without this void in which bodies change their places, there could have been no motion? It is known, that this motion depends on the laws of attraction; but how can attraction act through a vacuum, unleſs we admit a ſpiritual force, which operates without contact, and without interruption from the interpoſition of matter or its atoms? I may then adopt this force, or its equivalent, as the cauſe of the impreſſions of which our ſouls are ſuſceptible.

Let others explain, in their turn, by what material communication, the ſight of a few immoveable characters, traced on inſenſible marble, diſturbs my ſoul. I may be made to comprehend, by what mechaniſm the eye diſtinguiſhes the characters; but there ends the phyſical action: For we cannot attribute to that action the general power of producing moral ſenſations in the mind; ſince perhaps, any other man might view the ſame characters, without receiving a ſimilar impreſſion.

It is very poſſible, that our intellectual perceptions have no connection with motion, ſuch as we conceive it. Our *interior* nature, which we diſtinguiſh by the name of *ſpiritual*, is probably very different from our *external* nature. But ſince we are obliged to apply to the myſteries of the ſoul, thoſe expreſſions which ſerve to delineate

and

and explain the phenomena ſubmitted to our inſpection, the continual uſe of ſuch expreſſions has inſenſibly habituated us to entertain ſimilar notions with regard to the cauſes and developement of our intellectual faculties. Thus, after having uſed the words *motion*, *reſt*, *agitation* and *action*, to diſtinguiſh different affections of the ſoul, we come, at laſt, really to aſſimilate our moral nature, to the ideas which are repreſented by theſe denominations. Even death itſelf, of which we have no knowledge, but by the diſſolution of our phyſical being,—death, that image borrowed from things that are under the inſpection of our ſenſes, has, probably, neither relation nor analogy with the nature and eſſence of our ſpirit. Theſe are incomprehenſible ſecrets, and a kind of knowledge very different from any thing with which we are acquainted.

We act, with regard to theſe myſteries, like men born deaf, who apply to ſounds thoſe terms which they are accuſtomed to uſe, in ſpeaking of colour, ſmell, ſolidity, and other properties that they comprehend by means of the ſenſes with which they are endowed.

I ſhall add only another obſervation: Perhaps we ſhould never have thought of applying the words which expreſs *action* and *motion* to all the operations of our ſoul, had we not, firſt, divided our ſpiritual being into a great number of depen-

dependencies, ſuch as attention, reflection, thought, judgment, imagination, memory and foreſight; and then, in order to render intelligible thoſe abſtract parts of our mind,—thoſe parts of a unity which we ourſelves have decompoſed, found ourſelves under a neceſſity of reſorting to thoſe ſimple expreſſions which are generally underſtood. We have therefore adopted the words *action*, *progreſs*, *combat*, *movement*: But the familiar uſe of theſe terms, in explaining the accidents of our moral ſyſtem, very much reſembles the uſe we make of *x* in algebra, in every calculation which involves a ſuppoſition.

In ſhort, though we ſhould ſuppoſe that the action of our ſoul were ſubjected to ſome particular laws of motion, forming one of the dependencies of the great one, yet the cauſe of the conſciouſneſs we have of this action, would ſtill remain to be explained; a wondrous conſciouſneſs, which Atheiſts refuſe to Nature, although, at the ſame time, they conſider Nature as the God of the univerſe. Were reaſon even able to convince us, that all the operations of the human mind are ſubjected to the impreſſions of external objects, yet we could not rank under the ſame laws, the conſciouſneſs we have of our exiſtence, and the different faculties of our ſoul. This conſciouſneſs is neither the reſult nor the production of any known force; ſince it has always exiſted within us, independent of external

objects,

objects, and never can be inveſtigated by us. In our intellectual organization, it reſembles the diſtant idea of eternity, that infinite and profound thought, which even imagination can never comprehend!

Let us, however, admit for a moment, that all the operations of our ſoul are determined by ſome certain impulſion, ſtill we ſhall be ſtruck with the abſolute difference which exiſts, according to our apprehenſion, between the regular movement of matter, and the various unaccountable emotions of our hearts and minds: Emotions ſo numerous, and ſo differently modified, that our attention is diſtracted in attempting to examine the multiplicity and immenſe diverſity of the ideas which give riſe to them. After having vainly endeavoured to conceive the union eſtabliſhed between our thoughts and exterior objects, we have yet to form an idea of the action of theſe thoughts on themſelves,—their progreſs and connection. Our mind, wandering and confounded amidſt ſuch reflections, leaves us only a conſciouſneſs of our weakneſs; and we feel that there is a certain altitude, and, as it were, an intellectual ſummit, above which the human faculties can never riſe.

One ſingle character, within the reach of our judgment, enables us to diſcover an abſolute difference between *ſoul* and *matter*. It is eaſy to conceive, that the latter muſt be infinitely divi-

ſible,

ſible, whilſt, on the contrary, all the efforts of imagination could never divide the wonderful unity we call *ſelf*, which is ſovereign over our will, our thoughts, and all our faculties *.

If we examine the properties of matter in other reſpects, we can as little aſſimilate the emotions of the ſoul to them; for we feel diſtinctly that thoſe emotions, however numerous, and though acting at the ſame time, always terminate in one centre, which is that indiviſible Being we call *ſelf*: whereas matter, by an eſſential property, can never be preſſed or ſtruck in different ways, at the ſame inſtant, except in ſeparate points, which tend to different centres.

There is then no reſemblance between the impreſſions that our ſouls receive, and the various effects we attribute to the action of thoſe material ſubſtances with which we are conver-

 ſant.

* Some perſons, in order to weaken this argument, have alleged, that the ſame indiviſible unity may be attributed to all the qualities of matter: That a round body may indeed be diviſible, but that *roundneſs* or *impenetrability*, are not ſo. Such an objection is evidently ill founded. Roundneſs and impenetrability are only qualities; and every quality, conſidered in the abſtract, muſt neceſſarily be invariable; thus, we can no more *divide* it, than we can *multiply* or *increaſe* it. But my ſoul, my thoughts, my conſciouſneſs, form a perſonal, a particular exiſtence, and if they were of the nature of matter, they ought, like it, to be diviſible.

ſant. Thoſe ſubſtances are always connected with the idea of ſpace and extent. But that ultimate point in which all our perceptions terminate,—that abſolute judge, who dictates laws in the internal empire, the revolutions of which we only know,—that ſole director of our will,—that *ſelf* in ſhort, which is at once our friend and maſter, can never be found in any compound idea. This ſimple *unity* of *ſelf* may then fully convince us, that there is nothing within the reach of our ſenſes, that can ſerve as a type of the idea which we ought to form of the ſoul.

When we conſider the various deliberations and deciſions with which that ſpiritual unity, that *ſelf*, is conſtantly occupied, we diſcover further traces of this truth. We imagine it ſeated on a throne, hearing and examining the various reaſons which are to determine its action: We ſee it, like Nero, yielding ſometimes to Narciſſus and ſometimes to Burrhus: But although we plainly diſcover all the counſellors, flatterers and enemies which ſurround it, yet we remark only a ſingle maſter amidſt the tumults and intrigues of this court.

In ſhort, ſince the ſoul may be agitated by mere abſtract and fugitive ideas, the operation of which is, of all things, the moſt oppoſite to the action of matter, What reaſoning can perſuade us that it is not purely intellectual and ſpiritual?

ſpiritual? It is true, that corporeal infirmities often affect the mind; but this relation is no proof of identity, ſince the body may probably be an organ deſigned for the temporary uſe of the ſoul. Continuity of exiſtence, conſidered abſtractly, is certainly, in the univerſe, the moſt ſimple and natural ſtate, and a tranſitory exiſtence is perhaps the only one which is truly extraordinary and complicated. The ſoul is too noble to be aſſimilated to the latter kind: It may ſeem to exiſt in a different manner, when joined to a material ſubſtance, but that connection does not deſtroy its original eſſence.

It is by our ſenſes, no doubt, that we diſcover all the powers which belong to our exiſtence. They are the parts of our mixed being, which ſtrike us moſt forcibly during the preſent moment. It is perhaps by a natural law of this kind, that we find men, when tranſported by any violent paſſion, entirely inſenſible to every other moral affection. But why ſhould it be contrary to the nature of things, that the ſoul, once ſtripped of its terreſtial cloathing, ſhould become acquainted with its own nature, and, riſing to a ſuperior rank in the univerſe, ſhould perceive thoſe truths which are at preſent involved in obſcurity? A latent fire languiſhes unknown in the cold flint; but, on being ſtruck, there iſſues from it a brilliant light. This may,

perhaps, afford a faint reſemblance of the ſtate of the ſoul when death breaks its fetters.

Since, in a matter ſo obſcure, every ſuppoſition is admiſſible, Who can aſſure us, that our ſoul has not been, while on earth, as it were, under a magical influence, or in a kind of interruption of its ordinary exiſtence? All we ſee of the univerſe is an aſſemblage of incomprehenſible phenomena; and when we ſtrive to reſolve our doubts by the aid of ideas on a level with our intelligence, we wander from the truth, which often ſeems to lie concealed in the depths of infinity.

It may be doubted whether we can allow the metaphyſical reaſonings employed in defence of the ſpirituality of the ſoul, to have deciſive authority: Such arguments are, however, ſufficient to repulſe the attacks of materialiſts. To me it appears evidently true, that we are all too weak to attain or comprehend the ſecret for which we ſearch. We have, according to our ſmall degree of knowledge, divided the univerſe into two parts, *ſpirit* and *matter*: But this diviſion only ſerves to diſtinguiſh thoſe things of which we know *a little*, from others of which we know *nothing*. There are, perhaps, infinite gradations among the various properties which compoſe motion and life, inſtinct and intelligence. We can indeed only expreſs ſuch ideas as are within the reach of our underſtanding;

ing; and the general terms which we uſe, often ſerve merely to detect the vain ambition of our mind: But when we conſider the immenſity of the univerſe, we ſhall find, that there is ſufficient ſpace for all thoſe ſhades and modifications, which we cannot expreſs, nor even conceive.

It cannot be denied, that the connection of our phyſical powers with our intellectual faculties, and the action which they have on each other, give riſe to doubts and anxieties; but, independent of this relation, and the appearance of our decay and fall, all would be diſtinct and manifeſt in the fate of man. Since then, a ſhade appears in the midſt of the picture, which continually attracts our attention, we muſt collect all our intellectual light, to diſcover the diſtant proſpect of our deſtiny; and, for the ſame reaſon, we muſt, above all, have our minds deeply impreſſed with the idea of a God, in whoſe power and goodneſs we ought to look for that ultimate explication which we ſeek.

There is a ſort of contradiction obſervable in ſome mens opinions, with which I have been often ſtruck. The ſame perſons, who, amidſt the immenſe prodigies of the univerſe, will venture to aſcribe the power of underſtanding all the ſecrets of nature to our intellectual faculties, nevertheleſs wiſh to diveſt the ſoul of its true dignity, by refuſing it that ſpirituality and duration, by which alone it can be exalted.

Happily, neither theſe refuſals nor conceſſions, can fix our fate. The nature of the ſoul will ever remain as much unknown to us as the eſſence of the Supreme Being: And it is even a proof of the grandeur of the ſoul, that it is involved in the ſame myſteries that conceal from us the Infinite Intelligence, which directs and preſerves the univerſe. But there are ſome ſimple and intimate ſentiments, which afford us more comfort and hope than metaphyſical reaſonings. When we contemplate the wonderous attributes of thought, and the vaſt empire ſubjected to it,—when we reflect on the faculty with which it is endowed, of fixing the paſt, of advancing to futurity, of bringing the whole univerſe into its view, and comprehending, as it were, in one point, the immenſity of ſpace and the infinity of time,—when we conſider this prodigy, we muſt join to our deep admiration, a belief that there is ſome end, ſome purpoſe, in view, worthy of ſo great a conception, and worthy of the wiſdom of Him whom we adore. Can we then diſcover this great end, in the tranſient breath, the fleeting moment, which compoſes life? Can we diſcover it in thoſe phantoms of a day, whoſe ſucceſſive appearance would ſerve only to mark the progreſs of time? In ſhort, Can we find it in this general ſyſtem of deſtruction, where the inſenſible plant, unconſcious of life, and the intelligent man, who

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diſcovers all the charms of exiſtence, muſt equally ſink to nothing? Let us not thus degrade our nature and our deſtiny; and let us judge and hope better of what is unknown to us. Life, which affords us conſtant means of approaching towards perfection, ſhould not lead to eternal death. The mind, which is the prolific ſource of knowledge and intelligence, ought not to be loſt in the dreary abyſs of annihilation. Senſibility, which, by its pure and gentle emotions, unites us to others, in a manner ſo delightful, ought not to evaporate like a dream. Conſcience, which continually watches our actions, as a ſevere and incorruptible judge, could not be intended to deceive us. Piety and virtue cannot, ſurely, in vain, elevate our views to that model of perfection, which is the object of our love and adoration. The Supreme Being, to whom all times belong, ſeems already to have ſealed our union with futurity, by endowing us with foreſight, and by implanting in our heart a paſſionate deſire of long duration, with a ſecret ſentiment which, in the receſſes of our ſoul, encourages our hope of future exiſtence. There are certain relations, though obſcure, between our moral nature and futurity; and perhaps our wiſhes, our hopes, are a ſixth ſenſe, a ſenſe as it were at a diſtance, of which we ſhall one day experience the enjoyment. I ſometimes

imagine too, that love,—the nobleſt ornament of our nature,—the ſweeteſt charm of life, is a myſterious pledge of the accompliſhment of theſe hopes: For, by diſengaging us from ourſelves, and, as it were, carrying us beyond the limits of our own being, it ſeems the firſt ſtep towards an immortal nature; and, by affording us an example of an exiſtence out of ourſelves, it ſeems to demonſtrate to our feelings, that which our minds cannot comprehend.

What appears to me the moſt ſtriking reflection of all; is, that when I ſee the human mind attaining to the knowledge of the exiſtence of a God,—when I ſee it, at leaſt, aſpire to an idea ſo grand, that lofty degree of elevation prepares me, in ſome meaſure, for the ſublime deſtiny of the ſoul. I look for a proportion between that great thought and all the concerns of this world, but I find none;—between that boundleſs proſpect, and the narrow picture of life, but I perceive none. There is then, without doubt, ſome magnificent ſecret, beyond all that we can diſcern,—ſome aſtoniſhing wonder behind this curtain, that is yet unfurled, of which we every where ſee the commencement. Ah! Can we indeed imagine, that all that affects and animates us, all that guides and directs us, is merely a ſeries of deceits, an aſſemblage of illuſions! The univerſe, with all its majeſtic pomp, would then have been deſtined to ſerve as a theatre for an empty

empty ſhew; and that great idea, that magnificent conception, would have had for its object, a mere dazzling chimera! What had then ſignified this mixture of real beauties with falſe appearances? What had availed this concourſe of phantoms, without end or deſign, whoſe exiſtence would be leſs eſtimable than a ray of light deſtined to enlighten their dwelling? In ſhort, What had ſignified in thoſe beings, that union of ſublime thoughts and deceitful hopes? Let us beware of giving credit to ſuch a ſuppoſition. Would we thus dare to impute to Him whoſe power has no limits, the artifices of weakneſs? Ah! if ſo far as our underſtanding can reach, we every where perceive an order, a deſign, a dependence, ſhall we, as ſoon as we arrive at the limits of our faculties, there ſet bounds to the views of Supreme Intelligence, and fancy that all is terminated, becauſe we are ignorant of what may ſucceed? Alas! we poſſeſs but a day, but a moment, and yet we pretend to tell all that has been, and all that will be! Let us, however, only retain the idea of a God, let us not quit our confidence in the exiſtence of the Supreme Ruler of the World, and by habituating ourſelves to this elevated thought, we may defend our hopes againſt all the metaphyſical arguments which otherwiſe we might not be prepared to anſwer.

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Will it be here ſaid, That mere hope is inſufficient for determining men to obſerve morality, and for ſubjecting them to thoſe acts of ſelfdenial, which the practice of virtue ſeems to demand? But what elſe than hope actuates them, in all the occurrences of life? What elſe than hope renders them ambitious of honour and fortune? and when they have arrived at the wiſhed for object, what do they, for moſt part, obtain, except an advantage depending on imagination and hope? Wherefore, then, ſhould they require certain demonſtration, to induce them to ſeek after thoſe things which are by far the grandeſt, and moſt worthy of purſuit, of any that the human mind can conceive? On the contrary, the ſmalleſt degree of probability ſhould here become a motive of encouragement: And what worldly concerns can be put in competition with the ſlighteſt hope of pleaſing the Ruler of the univerſe, and of maintaining that intercourſe with Him, which ſeems to be indicated by our natural ſentiments, and by the firſt perceptions of our mind?

I may go ſtill further; I may venture to aſk thoſe at leaſt who poſſeſs ſenſibility, if, even on the ſuppoſition, that this life were their ſole heritage, they would not ſtill feel a deſire of pleaſing the Sovereign Author of Nature? Ought not theſe moments He has granted us, in which we may know and admire Him, to be conſidered

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as a benefit? We celebrate the memory of thoſe princes who have ſignaliſed themſelves in the world by doing good, and ſhall we not render homage to Him who, if it be allowed ſo to ſpeak, has planned our exiſtence, and the various enjoyments to which we are ſo ſtrongly attached,—to Him who has formed our magnificent habitation, and made the elements ſubſervient to its uſe,—to Him who has permitted us to ſee the wonders of the univerſe, and who has made us ſo frequently, though not conſtantly, to enjoy happineſs? Shall we who are ſo weak and ignorant, dare to meaſure the wiſdom, and calculate the power of our Supreme Benefactor, and impiouſly reproach Him for not having done more for us? This would indeed be the language of the baſeſt ingratitude. But I have already proved, that our ſentiments are not put to this ſevere teſt: We are allowed more liberal conditions in treating with the Supreme Being. He has every where ſurrounded us with objects to encourage our hopes. He has permitted us, to arrive at ſome knowledge of His perfections, and to read them in that aſſemblage of glory and magnificence which the univerſe diſplays. He has allowed us to attain the perception of goodneſs, of power, of infinity and of happineſs; and by this ſucceſſion of ideas He has guided our deſires and our hopes. How great, how ſublime, is the contemplation of the Eternal, how comfortable

ſortable to a ſoul poſſeſſed of ſenſibility! But theſe ideas ought to be early implanted in the human heart,—they ought to be connected to our firſt thoughts, while our ſentiments are purely natural, ſo that they may gradually advance, in order to gain vigour,—before we come to mix with the preſumptuous multitude, who are diſpoſed to treat every thing with contempt that is not their own work,—before we enter into ſociety, amidſt men, who fancy themſelves to be enlightened, whilſt, hurried on by levity, they every day follow a new maſter, and are really the ſlaves of pleaſure and vanity.

The eſtabliſhment of public worſhip is the moſt proper means of maintaining ſuch principles, as have been thus early inculcated,—a ſimple method, well calculated to command attention to thoſe abſtract reaſonings that are often neceſſary for communicating inſtruction. Public worſhip, by aſſembling men of every ſtation, by recalling them to a juſt ſenſe of their own weakneſs, and equally humbling every individual before the great Ruler of the univerſe, would be, merely from theſe circumſtances, an important leſſon of morality. But this worſhip is a conſtant ſource of conſolation to ſome, while it habitually reminds others of their duty. Above all, it is grateful to thoſe gentle and feeling minds, who maintain a conſtant awful ſenſe of their dependence on God,—who love Him in

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ſecret, and wiſh to adore Him in his temples; where, joining in the general fervour of devotion, they venture to lift their faultering voices to Heaven, in humble ſupplication. In ſhort, while men are aſtoniſhed and loſt in amazement, on conſidering the infinite grandeur of the univerſe, and the powers of their own ſouls, they are naturally led to the ſentiment of adoration, which unites them, by a reverential awe, at leaſt, to Him whom they can never comprehend, by all the powers of reaſon.

Let us beware of deſpiſing the emotions of piety; for they are inſeparable from its advantages;—philoſophers are bewildered in vainly attempting to confine the intereſts of man to the narrow circle of demonſtrable truths: For thoſe things which we ſee indiſtinctly and at a diſtance, are, for moſt part, more valued by us than others which are within our reach. Thus, we would be miſerable ſufferers indeed, were we to be deprived of the various enjoyments which depend ſolely on our imagination; for we have no other means of laying hold of things not immediately preſent. Beſides, ſince we aſſume imagination for a guide, in our career of ambition, and in our purſuit of fortune,—ſince philoſophers themſelves have allowed that it is the ſpring of all the paſſions, Why ſhall we reject it, when, being occupied by a greater and more ſublime object, it becomes the ſupport of our weakneſs,

weakneſs, the ſafeguard of our principles, and the ſource of our higheſt comfort?

It is the duty of Legiſlators to keep theſe truths in view, while they regulate the ſpirit of the laws, and direct the courſe of opinions: What a noble, what a glorious taſk falls to their ſhare, —To connect Happineſs with Morality, and Morality with the exiſtence of a GOD!

CHAP.

CHAP. XII.

That there is a GOD.

THAT THERE IS A GOD! How can we utter theſe words, without the moſt profound humiliation, and the moſt awful reverence? and how can we reflect without aſtoniſhment, that man, this feeble creature, this atom placed amidſt the immenſity of ſpace, undertakes to add ſome weight to that ſacred truth, of which all nature is the ſplendid witneſs? But, ſince our ſupreme happineſs depends on that truth, and ſince without it we are nothing, Why ſhould it not be ever preſent to our mind? Why ſhould it not conſtantly employ our thoughts? No other contemplation can be ſo truly intereſting, ſince it is the ſource and ſupport of every good, juſt and happy ſentiment. I confeſs it was with diffidence, I at firſt ventured to diſcuſs the objections which have been oppoſed to our belief in the exiſtence of a God. I dreaded that I might be overwhelmed by the ſubtility of argument, or,

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at leaſt, that I might expoſe to ſome danger an opinion ſo precious, and ſo eſſential to my happineſs. I found that a few general ideas, ſupported by lively feelings, were ſufficient for my tranquillity: Thus, had I not, from an earneſt deſire of promoting the welfare of mankind in general, been reſolved to give the utmoſt oppoſition in my power to that ſpirit of indifference, and falſe philoſophy, which ſeems to be daily gaining ground, I ſhould never have exceeded the bounds of my firſt enquiries. I am, however, very far from repenting of the part I have taken. Without riſking my opinions, and without any uneaſineſs, I glanced over thoſe books in which the moſt pernicious doctrines are artfully diſſeminated. It then occurred to me, that a man merely endowed with ordinary good ſenſe, while he conſiders the ſubtilities of metaphyſical diſquiſitions, in ſome meaſure reſembles thoſe uncultivated Indians, ſometimes brought amongſt us, who, ridiculing our depraved refinement of manners, often remind us by very obvious and natural obſervations, of many ſimple principles, and ancient maxims, of which we have entirely loſt ſight.

The whole ſtructure of religious ſentiments would fall to the ground, if, by falſe and ſubtle reaſoning, our confidence in the exiſtence of a God, were ever overthrown. Morality being no longer aſſociated with thoſe opinions that are its

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true ſafeguard, would become defenceleſs, having no other ſupport than political principles, whoſe influence would, in courſe of time, be inſenſibly weakened. Languor and melancholy would be diffuſed through every mind: There would then exiſt no ſentiment equally intereſting to all mankind, and proper to unite them into one community. Thoſe few alſo, whoſe intentions being pure, can only be guided and ſuſtained by intimate perſuaſion, would retire in diſmay, and leave to others the care of ſupporting moral order by fiction and falſehoods. They would pity that forlorn race, deſtined to appear and diſappear, like thoſe plants that flouriſh but for a day;—they would contemn, thoſe animated phantoms, that after making a buzz with their vanity and trivial paſſions, ſink, in an inſtant, into eternal oblivion. All the beauties of the univerſe, that ſo powerfully excite admiration and rapture in the human breaſt, would ſoon loſe their luſtre and their charm, were we only to view in ſuch a brilliant ſcene, the play of atoms, and the dull operation of blind neceſſity; for it is impoſſible to admire any thing, unleſs we perceive that it might have exiſted under a different modification. In ſhort, this ſoul, this mind, this vivifying principle in man, this thinking faculty, which aſtoniſhes and confounds even thoſe who revile it, would appear a vain movement, had it no cauſe, and were it to be followed by no

conſequence,—were there no univerſal intelligence, ſecretly breathing animation throughout all nature. But we have dwelt too long on this gloomy ſubject: Reſume your glowing colours and your life, ye wonderous works of God, the Creator of the univerſe! Come to inſtruct men,—to confound the pride of ſome, while ye ſupport the timid ſenſibility of others! Come, to take poſſeſſion of our ſouls, and to direct our united affections towards Him whom we ought to love, and who is the eternal model of perfect wiſdom and ſupreme goodneſs.

I will not here undertake to prove the exiſtence of a God, by a recital of the wonders we diſcover in the great and magnificent works of nature: Many celebrated writers have attempted this mode of proof, but their imperfect ſketches have always fallen far ſhort of the grand original. We cannot think of infinity without aſtoniſhment, and a humble reſpect, which overpowers all our faculties. Thus, while we endeavour, ſucceſſively, to repreſent the various wonders of nature, this conſtant change of objects tends rather to ſuſpend our admiration than to increaſe it: For every change eaſes the mind, by affording it a ſtation on which it may repoſe, and that relaxation its weakneſs requires; on the contrary, if we fix our attention on any particular phenomenon, and endeavour to inveſtigate it ſingly, we ſoon arrive at the limits of our faculties.

culties. We diſcover the narrowneſs of our underſtanding, as well by examining the organization of the ſmalleſt inſect, as by contemplating the faculties of our own ſoul; and the myſtery of ſimple vegetation ſeems as far above the reach of our intelligence, as the ſecret power that gives motion to the univerſe.

Then, as the natural effuſion of my heart, and as a hymn of grateful praiſe to the Supreme Being, but not as neceſſary inſtruction, I will briefly enumerate ſome of the principal characters of wiſdom and grandeur, with which all men muſt be equally ſtruck when they contemplate the wonders of the univerſe.

What a ſight is the world! What a magnificent ſpectacle for thoſe who can diveſt themſelves for a moment of their habitual indifference! We know not where to begin,—we know not where to fix, while we attempt to call to view ſo many prodigies; but the moſt noble of all is the faculty which has been beſtowed on us, of conceiving and admiring them. What an aſtoniſhing and ſublime relation do we find, between the innumerable beauties of nature, and our phyſical intelligence, which enables us to diſcover them, and to enjoy them with delight! What a wonderous connection do we alſo obſerve, between the order and harmony of the univerſe, with our moral intelligence, which enables us to aſpire at unbounded wiſdom and

knowledge! Nature, though immenſe, and all that it contains, all that it diſplays with ſo much ſplendour, ſeems to be connected by ſome particular relation, either to our ſenſes, or to our mental powers. Theſe inviſible and incomprehenſible faculties all unite to form that wonder of wonders, which we call *happineſs*. Let not thoſe ſimple terms we muſt employ, turn our attention from the ineffable ideas which they repreſent! The great phenomena of our exiſtence are the more wonderful, that they can neither be defined, nor expreſſed in different ways; and the common words we uſe, ſuch as, *ſoul, ſpirit, ſenſation, life, happineſs*, and many others which we pronounce ſo ſlightly, all equally confound our underſtanding, when we endeavour to fix our attention on the eſſence of thoſe properties of which they are the ſymbols. For this reaſon, among many others, the ſucceſſive admiration of the various particulars in the works of nature, is never found to be fully ſatisfactory to minds poſſeſſed of ſenſibility; becauſe ſuch admiration is founded on ideas dependent on human knowledge: But the principal charm of our relation with the wonders around us, ariſes from our experiencing the continual impreſſion of infinite greatneſs, and from feeling the neceſſity of flying to that happy refuge for weakneſs and ignorance,—the ſublime idea of a God. We are conſtantly carried back towards

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this idea, by the vain efforts which we make to penetrate the ſecrets of our own nature: And when I fix my attention on thoſe aſtoniſhing myſteries, which in a manner terminate the powers of our mind, I conſider, with emotion, that they may, perhaps, be the only barrier that ſeparates us from the Infinite Mind, the Source of all Intelligence.

Men who poſſeſs the moſt extenſive genius, ſoon perceive the limits of their faculties, when they attempt to dive too far into the depths of metaphyſical ſubjects: But the moſt ſimple and untutored mind, can readily diſtinguiſh thoſe traces of order and harmony which every where announce, with ſo much luſtre, a purpoſe and deſign worthy of infinite wiſdom. It appears, that all the knowledge neceſſary to inſpire men with proper ſentiments, has been conſtantly placed within their reach. The intelligent aſtronomer, from obſerving the courſe of our globe around the ſun, perceives the cauſe of that regular ſucceſſion of winter and ſummer, which ſecures the fecundity of the earth, and renews, each revolving ſeaſon, its brilliant attire: But does not the ſimple huſbandman, who only ſees the faithful earth annually pour out its rich bounties, which correſpond, with ſuch admirable preciſion, to the various wants of every creature, perceive enough to excite his admiration and gratitude? Newton analyſed light, and calcula-

ted the velocity with which it glances through the immenſity of ſpace; But is not the illiterate herdſman, who ſees, when he wakes, his cottage enlightened by the ſame rays which animate all nature, a witneſs of a phenomenon that muſt equally excite his wonder and gratitude? The indefatigable anatomiſt gains a juſt idea of the inimitable mechaniſm and wonderful ſtructure of our various organs; But has not the unſkilful man, who reflects a moment on the various ſenſations and pleaſures of which we are ſuſceptible, alſo ſufficient ground for admiration and thankfulneſs?

The degree of knowledge peculiar to men of enlightened minds, is a kind of ſuperiority which diſappears before the incommenſurable grandeur, preſented by the idea of the univerſe. Compared with infinity, the talents of all men are equal; and it is probably beyond the utmoſt ſtretch of human intelligence, that the greateſt wonders of nature begin. The knowledge of all ages has been unable to explain the imperious authority of our will over our actions. Neither has it been diſcovered, how our thoughts can reach the moſt remote ages;—how our minds can comprehend ſuch a multitude of preſent objects, of recollections, and anticipations; nor is it known, how all theſe precious qualities of our mind, ſhould ſometimes remain in a latent ſtate, as unconſcious of their exiſtence, and at other times,

times ſhould iſſue from their obſcurity, and at its command, either regularly ſucceed each other, or be poured forth with profuſion. Alas! while we contemplate theſe aſtoniſhing phenomena, How preſumptuous do men appear, who, through vain pride, miſapprehending their degree of ſtrength, ſtrive to penetrate into thoſe ſecrets, to which an inviſible hand oppoſes their approach! Let them be contented that their exiſtence is united to ſo many wonders,—let them be ſatisfied with the bounty of nature, and let them, with reverence, adore that Sovereign Power which has beſtowed ſo many bleſſings on them, and eſtabliſhed a relation between them and all the active principles of heaven and earth.

The globe which we inhabit, annually paſſes through a ſpace of two hundred millions of leagues; and, in this immenſe courſe, its diſtance from the ſun, by immutable laws, is exactly proportioned to the degree of temperature neceſſary for our weak nature, and perfectly accommodated to the important purpoſe of vegetation, without which no living creature could ſubſiſt.

The glorious orb that vivifies the ſeeds depoſited in the boſom of the earth, is, at the ſame time, the ſource of that light, which diſcloſes to our view the grand proſpect of the univerſe. The rays of the ſun traverſe more than thirty

millions of leagues in eight minutes: A motion ſo rapid would be ſufficient to reduce the largeſt maſſes of matter to powder; but ſuch is the inconceivable tenuity of theſe rays, that they ſtrike the moſt delicate of our organs, not only without injuring it, but in a manner ſo gentle and pleaſant, that they give riſe to that delightful ſenſation, which is the origin of our greateſt enjoyments. Thus, one principal means of our happineſs is tranſmitted to us through the immenſity of ſpace.

Man, amidſt boundleſs ſpace, is only an imperceptible point; and yet by his ſenſes and his intelligence, he ſeems to be in communication with the whole univerſe. How pleaſant, how peaceable is that communication. It is almoſt like the intercourſe of a prince with his ſubjects: To man every thing is animated, every thing contributes to fulfil his deſires and ſupply his wants: Nature ſeems entirely occupied, in providing for him. The action of the elements, and every thing on earth, like the rays of light, ſeem to be proportioned to his faculties and ſtrength: And while the celeſtial bodies move with a rapidity which terrifies our imagination,—while this globe on which we dwell, is hurried along with them in their courſe, we remain in a quiet aſylum, and peaceably enjoy a multitude of bleſſings, which are allied, in a wonderful manner, to our various inclinations and ſentiments.

Man

Man has likewiſe the advantage of being often permitted to become, in ſome meaſure, the contriver of his own happineſs. By his ingenuity and ſtudy, he is enabled to embelliſh his habitation, and add various ornaments to the ſimple beauties of nature. He improves by his care every uſeful plant; and diſcovers ſome ſalutary properties, even in thoſe that appear moſt dangerous: He can ſoften metals, and make them ſubſervient to his purpoſes: He can make the marble to obey his touch, and aſſume whatever form he deſires: He gives laws to the elements, or, at leaſt, circumſcribes their empire; he oppoſes ramparts to ſtop the progreſs of the ſea; he ſometimes confines rivers to their wonted channel; and ſometimes leads them into different courſes, that they may extend their beneficial influence. He erects a ſhelter againſt the fury of the winds; and by an ingenious contrivance, he employs for his uſe, that impetuous force, from which he, at firſt, ſought only a defence. Even fire itſelf, whoſe terrible action ſeems to be the preſage of deſtruction, is ſubjugated by him, and rendered, if I may ſpeak ſo, the companion of his induſtry and labour.

How great a ſource of reflection is this dominion of the mind, over the moſt formidable effects reſulting from the movement of blind matter! It would appear, that the Supreme Being, by ſubjecting, in part, to our intelligence the force

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of the moſt powerful elements, has choſen this method of communicating to us ſome notion of the empire, His infinite wiſdom has over the univerſe.

But it is by the influence our intellectual faculties have on themſelves, that we principally diſcover their admirable nature: We muſt remark with aſtoniſhment, the degree of improvement to which they ſometimes attain by their own operation. Intelligence, conſidered in a general view, is undoubtedly a great phenomenon; but it is ſtill more wonderful, to find our thoughts connected with, and agreeable to thoſe of all other men; and that an alliance ſubſiſts between our preſent trains of thought and thoſe of all ages. By ſuch an alliance, the ſciences have been improved, and the mind of man has become acquainted with all its own powers. The ſovereigns of the earth cannot break this aſſociation, nor ſubject to their tyrannic diviſions the auguſt inheritance of knowledge: This precious gift ſtill preſerves the ſtamp of a divine hand,—and no one can ſay, 'it is ſolely mine.'

The beſt uſe that man can make of this admirable union of knowledge and faculties, is to demonſtrate to his fellow-creatures, how immediately every thing in nature is related to the idea of a great Firſt Cauſe;—how in every different tract of ſtudy, we ſtill behold a wiſe deſign, and a beneficent will, eminently diſplayed in all the phenomena

mena of the univerſe. But now, unhappily theſe indications, theſe proofs, will not ſuffice. A daring philoſophy has ventured to ſport with thoſe arguments, founded on the connection and wonderful harmony of the ſyſtem of nature. It is not enough to oppoſe to ſuch opinions, the mere authority of final cauſes. The abettors of that philoſophy do not deny, that there is a perfect conformity between our deſires and our wants,—between our ſenſes and the bounties of nature: They do not deny, that from the lofty cedar to the humble hyſſop, from man to the meaneſt inſect, there is a beautiful ſymmetry, and a juſt proportion, equally obſervable in the general relation of objects one to another, and in the connection of the ſeveral parts of each conſidered ſeparately. But this admirable harmony, where the wiſe, the pious man, remarks with delight, the ſeal of an eternal intelligence, the followers of that moſt deplorable doctrine, ſtrive to repreſent, either as the fortuitous union, and the mere play of atoms, agitated by a blind movement,—or as the nature of things, which has exiſted from eternity. What pains have they taken to invent and to defend thoſe ſyſtems, ſo deſtructive of our happineſs, and our hopes! I value the intimate feelings of my mind more than all this philoſophy: But it might encourage its preſumption, were we timidly to ſhun its approach. Let us then examine, whether its

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exterior pride, and its haughty pretenſions, are founded on reaſon, and if it does not gain the reſpect of weak minds merely by its inſolence.

I WILL attempt to treat this queſtion, which is the moſt important one that can employ the thoughts of man, in the following manner:——I will firſt endeavour to ſhow, that the different conjectures concerning the origin of the world, all terminate in one opinion, The eternal and neceſſary exiſtence of every thing in nature. I will afterwards compare the baſis of that ſyſtem, with the foundation of that happy and natural belief, which unites the idea of a Supreme Being with all we ſee and know,—with the univerſe itſelf, the greateſt and moſt unlimited of our conceptions.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

The ſame Subject continued.

WHEN we find that ſeveral authors, who have framed conjectural ſyſtems with regard to the formation of the world, reject the belief of a God, as an idea foreign to the nature of our perceptions, Have we not a right to expect that they ſhould, in its place, ſubſtitute ſomething more probable, and better accommodated to our underſtanding? But, far from fulfilling ſuch an expectation, they give way to every vague fancy, every wild conceit. Indeed, whether they refer the origin of the univerſe to chance, and a fortuitous concourſe of atoms, or aſſume other hypotheſes deduced from the ſame principles, yet we muſt ſtill neceſſarily ſuppoſe,—the eternal exiſtence of an infinity of ſmall particles of matter, confuſedly jumbled through the immenſity of ſpace,—that theſe atoms, thus univerſally diſſeminated, ſhould attract and fit each other by certain properties peculiar to their nature,—that there ſhould reſult from their adheſion, not mere-

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ly the faculties of ſenſe, but even the intellectual powers, ſuch as thought, memory, foreſight, judgment and will;—in ſhort, we muſt ſuppoſe, that thoſe incomprehenſible molecules have been arranged in ſuch wonderful order, by the effect of ſome random chance, that may have poſſibly occurred amongſt the infinite number of accidental combinations. Indeed, after they have made ſo many ſuppoſitions, without the leaſt foundation, and without the ſmalleſt reſemblance to any thing we know, it plainly appears, that the belief of an Intelligent Spirit, the ſoul and director of the univerſe, better correſponds with our nature, and has more analogy with ſuch objects as are within the reach of our knowledge, than any thing they can advance.

But let us return to the examination of thoſe hypothetical principles we have juſt mentioned. We readily perceive that they have ariſen from a contracted mode of thinking. The mind is accuſtomed to paſs from ſimple to compound ideas, when employed in ſtudy or invention: And by an inverſe method, the compoſers of ſuch ſyſtems, have thought it only requiſite, in order to trace the univerſe to its origin, that they ſhould detach all its parts, and, in imagination, divide and ſubdivide them to infinity. But however great the tenuity of thoſe atoms may be ſuppoſed, yet, being poſſeſſed of ſuch intellectual and organic properties, as fancy muſt allow them,

them, their exiſtence would be a wonder in no reſpect inferior to all the phenomena with which we are ſurrounded.

When we ſee a plant ſpring up, and afterwards aſſume various beautiful colours, we only take into view the period in which its vegetation is obvious to our ſenſes: But the ſeed of this plant, or, if it muſt be ſo called, the organized molecule, the firſt principle of this ſeed, would have afforded us an equal cauſe of admiration, were we endowed with faculties ſufficient to penetrate into the occult myſteries of nature. But, by thus reducing the whole maſs of matter which compoſes the world into an impalpable powder, we repreſent to our fancy a mere fugitive vapour, which merits not our admiration; and thoſe who unhappily wiſh to ſhun the ſublime ſentiment of admiration, are enabled, by this ſyſtem of infinitely diviſible atoms, to remove the period at which they muſt be loſt in aſtoniſhment, to whatever diſtance they think proper.

All theſe fantaſtic ſchemes only tend to impede us in our ſearch for truth. I ſhall here offer a general obſervation on this ſubject: The ſtudy of the firſt elements of ſuch ſciences as are our own work, as geometry, language, civil legiſlation, and ſeveral others, appears, no doubt, to be the eaſieſt part of our education. It is, however, very different, when we attempt to inveſtigate the laws of the phyſical world: For the

works

works of nature never appear to us more ſimple than when we view them under their ordinary forms and combinations. They are then, to the mind, what harmony is to the ear,—and the juſt accord of all their parts, forms an unity perfectly accommodated to the degree of intelligence we poſſeſs. Thus, *man*, for example, that wonderful combination of ſo many different faculties, does not aſtoniſh the mind, on a general view, but is conſidered as a ſimple and familiar idea; yet we are embarraſſed and diſconcerted when we attempt to analyze his nature, and to diſcover the elementary principles of his liberty, his will, his thought, and the other properties of his mind.

We are then involved in profound obſcurity, and only proceed in a circle, when we would deſtroy the preſent world, by reducing it to atoms, in order again to bring it forth afreſh, after having rallied all the parts we had diſperſed.

Let us, however, admit for a moment, that organic and intelligent atoms do exiſt, and that they are ſo, either from their own nature, or by their adheſion to other molecules, it is ſtill neceſſary, that, with theſe atoms ſcattered in the immenſity of ſpace, the univerſe ſhould be compoſed,—that maſterpiece of harmony,—that perfect aſſemblage of every beauty and variety,—that inexhauſtible ſource of every ſentiment of admira-

admiration: And by rejecting the idea of a God, Creator and Ruler of all, we muſt have recourſe to the power of chance, that is to ſay, to the unknown effects of a perpetual motion, which, without regularity, will produce, in an unlimited time, every poſſible combination. But to accompliſh an infinite variety of combinations, it is not ſufficient merely to admit a continual movement; we muſt alſo ſuppoſe that this movement conſtantly ſhifts its direction in all parts of ſpace ſubjected to its influence. The exiſtence of ſuch a change, and of ſo much diverſity in the laws of motion, is a new ſuppoſition, that may be ranked among the other extravagances attached to ſuch ſyſtems.

But even granting all theſe chimerical hypotheſes,—the ſyſtem of the formation of the world by the fortuitous concourſe of atoms, is ſtill attended with inſuperable difficulties.

It is not eaſy to conceive that particles of matter, agitated in every poſſible manner, and capable, as has been ſuppoſed, of adhering in innumerable ways, ſhould not have become ſo entangled, and have formed ſuch a texture, as to have rendered the harmonious compoſition of the univerſe abſolutely impoſſible.

When we conſider abſtractly the unlimited number of chances that may be attributed to blind movement, we cannot conceive, nor even conjecture, how an infinite number of atoms endow-

ed with a property of uniting themſelves, and ſubjected to an endleſs diverſity of movements, could compoſe the heavenly bodies: For, long before the period when ſuch a great chance-ſtroke would have become probable, theſe atoms muſt have formed an immenſe multitude of partial combinations, and, had any one of theſe been incompatible with the general harmony, a world never could have been produced.

The ſame arguments are applicable to the formation of animated beings. Accident ſhould have produced men capable of living and tranſmitting life to others, long before having endowed them with ſo great a diverſity of faculties. And if they had happened to be formed with no more than four ſenſes, they would never have acquired a fifth, for the ſame reaſon, that we never can attain any new ſenſe. Beſides, that particular accident which produced living creatures, muſt have occurred long previous to the chance which has prepared for theſe beings all the productions neceſſary for their ſupport and preſervation.

It may, indeed, be ſuppoſed, that ſuch atoms as happened to be united in a manner incompatible with the arrangement of the univerſe, may have been ſeparated by the continual movement ſuppoſed to exiſt in the immenſity of ſpace: But how ſhould not ſuch a movement diſunite what it had formerly joined, and why

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ſhould it not deſtroy that harmony, which is ſaid to be the reſult of an accident, ſimilar to the fortuitous ſtroke which occaſioned the formation of the world?

Will it be alleged, that, ſuppoſing the conſtituent parts of matter to be once united in due proportion, and in maſſes proper to form the celeſtial bodies, this arrangement may be maintained by the effect of a predominant and invariable force? But how can we reconcile the prevalence of ſuch a force with the continual movement and conſtant change ſuppoſed to be neceſſary for the compoſition of the univerſe?

It might be demonſtrated in another manner, That the formation of worlds by the blind chance which depends on perpetual movement, and the invariable ſteadineſs of thoſe vaſt bodies, in their preſent ſtate, are propoſitions abſolutely irreconcileable. Let us illuſtrate this matter: The accidental combination of atoms neceſſary for producing the rude maſſes of the celeſtial bodies, being far leſs complicated than the combination neceſſary to produce them as they are, inhabited by intelligent beings, the firſt chance-ſtroke muſt, according to all the rules of probability, have very long preceded the other. Thus, according to the ſyſtem of the fortuitous formation of the univerſe from atoms, we muſt ſuppoſe, that theſe atoms, after being united ſo as to form the heavenly bodies, have been disjoined, ſcattered into

the immenſity of ſpace, and again reunited, as often as might be neceſſary, in order that, by an infinity of chance-ſtrokes, they ſhould come at laſt to produce a world, ſuch as ours, repleniſhed with intelligent beings ſuſceptible of improvement. Now, ſince thoſe intelligent beings add nothing to the ſtability of the world they inhabit,—ſince they contribute nothing to the wonderful coalition of its parts, Why ſhould this blind movement, which had ſo often united and diſunited the parts of the univerſe before its formation, be now no more felt? Why ſhould it not reduce this terreſtrial globe we inhabit to atoms, or at leaſt, afford us ſome inſtance of its deſtructive powers?

This argument is not merely confined to a world adorned with intelligent creatures; it is equally applicable to one merely regular in all its parts. For we find, in nature, a great multiplicity of beauties, and many traces of harmony, which ſeem unneceſſary for the ſupport of our globe, and which could not, with the ſmalleſt probability, be ſuppoſed to have been annexed to its exiſtence, were it admitted that the earth had been formed, diſſolved and reproduced an infinite number of times, before its preſent formation. And I would aſk, Why no veſtige, no appearance of ſuch changes are now diſcoverable in the operations of nature, and how it happens that this ſuppoſed movement has been, all at once, ſtopped?

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This difficulty, however, may be reſolved by the help of another ſuppoſition: It may be ſaid that the union and diſperſion of thoſe atoms proceed ſo ſlowly and ſo inſenſibly, as to elude our notice; and that even the obſervation of preceding ages, joined to our own experience, cannot certainly aſſure us, that all the parts of the univerſe may not be ſeparated by the ſame cauſes which effected their aſſemblage and junction.

No doubt, by plunging into infinity, and there forming ſuch a chain of ſuppoſitions as may ſuit our purpoſe, we may put ourſelves beyond the reach of every argument: And were I to follow the ſame courſe, in order to oppoſe one abſurdity with another, I would aſk why, amidſt the infinite combinations produced by the perpetual movement, man had not been created, deſtroyed and created afreſh, times without number, with the ſame faculties and thoughts, and under the ſame circumſtances as at preſent? And if it has been ſo, why, ſince we could only be ſeparated from our preceding exiſtence by a ſort of ſleep, the duration of which is imperceptible, we ſhould not appear, in our own apprehenſion, beings poſſeſſed of a perpetual exiſtence? Infinity admits of this extravagant hypotheſis, as well as the other vague ſuppoſitions, in which time is held of no account. We perceive, however, in what danger we are of erring, whilſt we

make uſe of the incomprehenſible idea of infinity, and raſhly endeavour to accommodate it, to the combinations formed by our limited underſtanding.

Let us now examine another objection: It may be alleged, That the planet we inhabit, is the reſult of an original chance-ſtroke; and that ſuch an accidental ſtroke is the leſs improbable, if we ſuppoſe, that there exiſts in the immenſity of ſpace, an infinite number of other aggregations of atoms, equally produced by the firſt throw of the die, which repreſent every poſſible form and every imaginable proportion. But then I would aſk, By what law could all thoſe irregular bodies, which, from their number and bulk, muſt be ſubjected to many different movements, be prevented from deranging the ſyſtem of planets formed at the ſame time with them, by this original chance-ſtroke?

I muſt here remark, that the order which we have acceſs to perceive, ſhould be conſidered as a proof of the univerſal order: For, in immenſity, where one part is nothing, compared with the whole, no part, without exception, could be preſerved, unleſs it were in equilibrium with all the reſt.

Thus, whether we ſuppoſe *an infinite ſucceſſion of chances*, to which the whole maſs of atoms have ever been ſubjected, or whether we are contented with the firſt general throw, divided into *an infinity*

infinity of ſections, reaſon will always oppoſe invincible difficulties to the concluſions that are attempted to be deduced from ſuch hypotheſes.

In ſhort, we ſhould never leave out of view, that, in order to underſtand this fortuitous formation of the world, according to every notion or apprehenſion of which we are capable, we muſt always ſuppoſe the eternal pre-exiſtence of organized and intelligent atoms,—of all the laws of affinity, and of various eternal movements, accompanied with a regular procedure, capable of preſerving the combinations produced by ſuch diverſified movements. I again repeat, that when the abettors of theſe ſyſtems, are obliged to have recourſe to ſuch miraculous firſt principles and, to allow to Nature ſuch aſtoniſhing properties, it is very unaccountable how they make that Nature itſelf, all at once, to act a part ſo blind and paſſive, in the formation of the univerſe: One ſuppoſition ſuperadded, more ſublime than all the others, would have enabled them to avoid a concluſion ſo ridiculous.

Although theſe abſurd ſyſtems, concerning the formation of the world, are founded on various unlimited hypotheſes, yet, in my opinion, they have ſo much reſemblance to each other, that we can ſcarcely diſcern any difference: And, on conſidering the narrowneſs of the circle through which the imagination can run, when applied to ſuch deep conceptions, we diſcover in our fa-

culties, a ſingular and unexpected degree of weakneſs. The authors of theſe ſyſtems, are, as it were, captives bound faſt in their own opinions, and the marks of their chain are very viſible. They talk continually of corpuſcles or atoms, which they ſuppoſe to play and mix together, either all at once, or at different times, in boundleſs ſpace. But when they wiſh to form ideas of liberty and will, as they cannot analyze theſe properties, they ſuppoſe them pre-exiſting in the elementary parts of which they fancy the univerſe to be compoſed; and they prudently take care to grant no action to *liberty* and *will*, in caſe they ſhould reſiſt the various movements, by which, according to their hypotheſis, the univerſe was formed.

Neither can they render this blind and accidental production of worlds more credible, by ſuppoſing not only an innumerable multitude of organized molecules, but even an infinite diverſity of molds to attract and form theſe atoms, by a force ſimilar to chemical affinity. Such a ſyſtem, though perhaps ſufficient to explain a few ſecondary cauſes, is quite inapplicable to the firſt formation of beings; for, with this aſſemblage of molds and atoms, all the great difficulties would ſtill ſubſiſt. How ſhall we conceive, that the different molds would have claſſed themſelves ſo properly as to conſtruct the ſimpleſt regular form, of which the parts are in due proportion,

portion, and accurately arranged? How is it poſſible, that the mold deſtined for the organized atoms, of which the cryſtalline is compoſed, would place itſelf in the centre of the mold adapted to form the pupil of the eye? or how would that one fall under the mold requiſite for the conformation of the eye-lid,—and ſo on, each mold correſponding with the other preciſely, through various gradations and innumerable diviſions and ſubdiviſions?

Again, were we to ſuppoſe an infinite ſucceſſion of molds, of which the larger always attracted the ſmaller, in the ſame manner as the molds attracted the atoms correſponding to them; ſuch a ſuppoſition, though the moſt extenſive one we are able to make, is quite inſufficient to account for the ſimpleſt phenomenon in nature. After all, the direction of a wiſe and active force is indiſpenſable, to arrange, with preciſion and regularity, thoſe ſuppoſed molds and their peculiar animated molecules. It is alſo neceſſary that thoſe deſtined to compoſe exterior fibres, ſhould not obſtruct the paſſage of thoſe molds deſigned to form the interior organs: In ſhort, it is neceſſary, that every one of theſe molds, in its procedure and developement, ſhould exactly obſerve all the delicate ſhades and ſlight lineaments, which blend or diſtinguiſh the different parts of the ſimpleſt natural production.

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We are indeed acquainted with a power which acts in every direction,—arranges every thing in order,—proceeds conſtantly towards a purpoſe,—forms deſigns,—executes them or ſtops them as ſeems requiſite, and which is, every moment, engaged in ſome complicated work: This power is *intelligent will.* We muſt then be aſtoniſhed that this faculty, of which we have an intimate conſciouſneſs and daily experience, ſhould always be overlooked by philoſophers, when they endeavour to inveſtigate the admirable order of the univerſe.

After rejecting the idea of a Powerful and Intelligent Will, as the director of the world, they may perhaps aſſume as a principle, the eternal exiſtence of a blind force, which, by an incomprehenſible neceſſity, may have been guided towards accompliſhing a perfect and harmonious combination of all the particles of matter, at firſt confuſedly ſcattered through the immenſity of ſpace: But this new ſuppoſition, like the others I have noticed, would only form a hypotheſis exactly ſimilar to that of the eternal exiſtence of the univerſe. In ſhort, the eternal exiſtence of all the elements, ſubſtances, powers and properties, neceſſary to produce the univerſe, would be a phenomenon no way different from the eternal exiſtence of the univerſe itſelf.

We may add, that theſe phenomena can only be ſeparated in the mind by an indiviſible inſtant,

ſtant, which, amidſt the boundleſs extent of eternity, can have no place in the imagination. For any period that can be mentioned, would ſtill be too late by an infinity of ages. The effect reſulting from an eternal cauſe, like that cauſe itſelf, can be referred to no particular period, at which we may fix its commencement.

We thus perceive, under another point of view, how abſurd and ridiculous thoſe chimerical operations are, ſuppoſed to have taken place before the exiſtence of the world,—and which have been ſometimes attributed to random ſtrokes of chance, and ſometimes to the invariable laws of blind neceſſity.

It is then evident, that there is only one hypotheſis which can be oppoſed to the belief of a God the ſovereign Diſpoſer of all things; that is, The ſyſtem of the eternal exiſtence of the univerſe. Such a ſyſtem of Atheiſm will always be ſupported by more ſpecious defences than any other; becauſe, being founded on a vaſt and boundleſs ſuppoſition, it paſſes entirely beyond the reach of reaſoning, like all thoſe hypothetical ideas, where men ſuppoſe nature to act in a way preciſely agreeable to their own fancy. I come now to conſider this dangerous ſyſtem, and to endeavour, by every means in my power, to demonſtrate its abſurdity.

CHAP. XIV.

The ſame Subject continued.

SOME philoſophers, who have maintained that the world ſubſiſts of itſelf, and that there is no God, allege in ſupport of their opinion, That if the eternal exiſtence of the univerſe ſurpaſſes our underſtanding, the eternal exiſtence of a God, the Creator and Diſpoſer of all things, preſents an idea ſtill more incomprehenſible; and that ſuch a ſuppoſition, is only ſuperadding *one difficulty more;* ſince, according to our mode of judging, the moſt wonderful work is a far leſs admirable phenomenon, than the intelligence which formed the deſign, and accompanied the execution.

Let us, in the firſt place, conſider this argument. It is abſurd to talk of *one difficulty more*, ſuperadded in infinity: Familiar ideas and expreſſions, ſuch as *more difficult*, *more eaſy*, *more ſimple*, and the like, being the reſult of compariſons, are only admiſſible within the circle of our own

own knowledge: Beyond that, ſuch ideas are no more applicable; for we can perceive no degrees in that immenſity which exceeds our view, and ſurpaſſes the reach of our intellectual powers.

No doubt the mind finds as much difficulty in endeavouring to form a diſtinct conception of God the Sovereign Author of Nature, as in attempting to comprehend the eternal exiſtence of the world without any cauſe. However, when we endeavour to ſtretch our thoughts towards the firſt traces of time, and, if I may uſe the phraſe, to the beginning of beginnings, we feel evidently, that far from conſidering the eternal exiſtence of an intelligent cauſe as increaſing the difficulty, we can only find repoſe in that opinion. Inſtead of reluctantly adopting this opinion, or thinking it improbable, we find it in reality moſt natural, ſince, according to our ordinary mode of judging, order is united to the idea of a deſign,—a multiplicity of combinations to the idea of intelligence. Thus, riſing from ſmaller things to greater, and reaſoning by analogy, we will naturally arrive at the idea of the exiſtence of a being, endowed with an infinite extent of thoſe intellectual powers, of which, in ſome degree, we ourſelves partake. The exiſtence of ſuch an eternal intelligence, is, doubtleſs, more eaſily conceived, than that of a univerſe, where all would ſeem intelligent, except the original moving power. The workman is ſurely ſuperior to the work:

work: But, according to our apprehenſion and judgment, an intelligent combination, formed without intelligence, would be, of all others, the moſt incredible, as well as the moſt incomprehenſible phenomenon.

It is of importance to remark, that according to the ſtrange ſyſtem in queſtion, the more evidently the world appeared to be the reſult of admirable wiſdom, the leſs able we would be to deduce any inference favourable to the belief of a God; ſince the author of a perfect work, is not ſo eaſily traced as an inferior artiſt. Thus, according to ſuch a ſyſtem, all thoſe who may enumerate the majeſtic wonders of nature, ſtupidly injure the cauſe of Religion, and weaken our belief of a Supreme Being. I think it is needleſs to refute an argument which leads to a concluſion ſo truly ridiculous.

An attentive view of the univerſe muſt render us very diffident of the judgments we form with regard to the ſimplicity of the phyſical laws: For all the general operations of Nature, depend on movements too great and too complicated for our comprehenſion. The vaſt circuit of two hundred millions of leagues, which our globe annually makes, appears not, ſurely, the ſimpleſt method of determining the ſucceſſive change of the ſeaſons, and of aſſuring the reproduction of plants neceſſary for the ſubſiſtence of animated beings: Neither would it occur to us, that the diſtance

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of thirty-four millions of leagues, between the ſun and the earth, was requiſite, in order to proportion the rays of light to the delicacy of our organs. However, ſince, even in the narrow circle ſubmitted to our view, we diſcover nothing of that ſuppoſed ſimplicity, Why ſhould we be guided by ſuch a principle, when we lift our thoughts towards the firſt link of the vaſt chain of beings,—when we attempt to examine, if there exiſts, beyond the immenſity of the univerſe, an intelligent cauſe? How inſignificant, amidſt theſe lofty contemplations, do theſe trivial words appear, pronounced from our petty tribunal, *that is one difficulty more?* The buzzing fly would be leſs contemptible than we, if capable of perceiving the order and magnificence of our palaces, it ſhould aſſert that no artiſt had planned the work, becauſe the exiſtence of the architect appears *one difficulty more.*

We then ſee, that in proportion to different degrees of capacity and ſkill, the term *ſimple* and *eaſy* are employed very differently. We daily ſee that the expreſſions are not applied in the ſame manner by the vulgar man and the man of cultivated underſtanding; yet the diſtance by which the different degrees of human intelligence is ſeparated, is probably very inconſiderable amidſt the univerſal ſcale of beings. All theſe reflections lead us to conclude, that beyond the limits of the human mind, what ſeems to us *compound*

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may be *ſimple*,—what ſeems *wonderful*, may be *eaſy*, and what we reckon inconceivable, may be *evident*.

HAVING examined the chief arguments uſed by the partiſans of the atheiſtical ſyſtems in queſtion, let us now endeavour to open a path amidſt the labyrinth which ſurrounds us, and let us look for a guide to conduct us in our reſearches.

We are immediate witneſſes of the exiſtence of the world, and we are conſcious of our own: Thus the *univerſe*,—the *cauſes* which produced the univerſe, or the *firſt principle* of theſe cauſes, muſt have been eternal. By this evident and natural propoſition, the eternity of ſome exiſtence, though the moſt incomprehenſible of all ideas, is ſhown to be an incontrovertible truth. Now, in order to fix our opinion, we are obliged to chuſe one of two *eternal* exiſtences, the one *intelligent* and free, the other *blind* and void of conſciouſneſs,—How can we heſitate a moment in adopting the firſt? An eternal exiſtence is ſo aſtoniſhing, and ſo much beyond our comprehenſion, that we muſt aſcribe to it every thing great and ſublime; and we are acquainted with nothing which poſſeſſes theſe characteriſtics in ſo eminent a degree as *intelligence* and *thought*.

Is it not very ſtrange, that in thoſe ſyſtematic diviſions, an eternal exiſtence ſhould be denied to thought, whilſt it is granted to matter and its blind

blind combinations? What a ſubverſion of all proportion! Shall we believe the eternal exiſtence of *matter*, becauſe it is preſent to our view; and ſhall we doubt the eternal exiſtence of *intelligence*,—though we know that the ſmall portion of it which we poſſeſs, is the ſource of our judgment, and even the guide of our ſenſes?

Is it not equally ſtrange, that, agreeably to ſuch a ſyſtem, feeling and conſciouſneſs ſhould be confined entirely to that inconſiderable part of the univerſe, which is made up of animated beings? Thus would the whole of nature be inferior to a *part*: And if no ſpirit, no ſoul, animated the univerſe, man ſhould appear, in his own eyes, to be the ultimate model of perfection; yet we only ſee in him, a ſlight ſketch, a faint ſhadow, of ſomething more complete and admirable. We perceive that he is always, ſo to ſpeak, beginning to think; and all the efforts he can make, to extend the empire of his thinking faculty, only demonſtrate that he purſues an end which continually recedes from his graſp. In ſhort, after his greateſt exertions, he feels more and more his own weakneſs: He ſtudies, but he cannot know himſelf: He makes a few diſcoveries, but is ſoon loſt in his reſearches; and he every where obſerves ſecrets in nature, which he cannot penetrate: He is fallen into the world like a grain of ſand driven by the winds: He has neither conſciouſneſs of his origin, nor fore-

ſight of his end: He diſcovers all the timidity and diffidence of a dependent being: He is led by inſtinct to raiſe his thoughts and wiſhes to heaven; and if not intoxicated by fallacious reaſoning, he will reverence, confide in, and adore a God, and reject with terror, the arrogant rank which ſome philoſophers have audaciouſly aſſigned to him in the order of nature.

I muſt add, that the degree of admiration due to our intellectual faculties, would be greatly diminiſhed, were we reduced to conſider man as a mere vegetable body, the production of blind matter: For the moſt aſtoniſhing production can only occaſion a ſlight emotion, if it cannot be referred to ſome intelligent cauſe. The diſcovery of wiſdom and deſign, is as neceſſary to excite *admiration*, as the perception of will and affection is to produce *love*.

But, as ſoon as we view the human mind as the ſtamp of Omnipotence,—as ſoon as it appears the reſult of a Supreme Intelligence, it ſeems to reſume its dignity, and all the faculties of the ſoul humbly bend to that wonderous conception.

The intellectual faculties of the human mind can then only be entitled to our admiration and reſpect, when we conſider them as united with the idea of a God: By reflecting, in this manner, on their ſublime properties and admirable eſſence, we become confirmed in the opinion, That there exiſts a Sovereign Intelligence, the

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Soul of the univerſe, which animates and governs all nature by immutable laws. Yes, we find in the human mind an original trace, an imperfect image, of thoſe perfections, which are the attributes of the Great Author of Nature. What a wonder indeed is our thinking faculty! But though poſſeſſed of ſo many aſtoniſhing powers, yet, being ignorant of its own nature, it muſt look beyond itſelf, in order to diſcover what it ought moſt to admire. This faculty is equally aſtoniſhing, whether we conſider its vaſt extent on the one hand, or its narrow limits, on the other. A boundleſs ſpace is open to its reſearches; while, at the ſame time, it cannot comprehend any of thoſe ſecrets which appear, by their proximity, to be moſt within its reach: Thus, the cauſe of its action, and the principles of its intellectual powers, remain entirely unknown to itſelf. Man, being then conſtantly reminded both of his grandeur and dependence, theſe thoughts will naturally lead him to the idea of Omnipotence. Amidſt this mixture of knowledge and ignorance,—amidſt the glimmering light we enjoy, every thing announces an evident deſign; and methinks I ſometimes hear this mandate given to the human ſoul, by the God of the univerſe: 'Go and admire a part of 'My univerſe,—learn to love Me, and to enjoy 'happineſs; but ſeek not to withdraw the veil 'with which I have covered the ſecret of thy

'origin, and thy exiſtence. I have infuſed into 'thy nature ſome of thoſe attributes which con-'ſtitute My own eſſence,—thou wouldſt be too 'near Me, wert thou permitted to penetrate thoſe 'myſteries: Wait, therefore, the time appointed 'by My wiſdom;—till then thou canſt only ap-'proach Me by reverence and gratitude.'

We are connected to the univerſal Intelligence, not merely by the wondrous faculty of *thought*, but alſo by all thoſe incomprehenſible properties, known by the names of *liberty*, *judgment*, *will*, *memory* and *foreſight*; and, in ſhort, by all the auguſt aſſemblage of our intellectual faculties. When we contemplate this grand phenomenon, Can we any longer heſitate to believe in the exiſtence of a God, the Eternal Ruler of the world? No, doubtleſs: We poſſeſs within us, a faint image of that Infinite Power which we ſeek to diſcover. Man himſelf is, as it were, a univerſe, governed by a ſovereign; and, by his nature, it is eaſier for him to conceive the exiſtence of a Supreme Intelligence, than to form any notion of thoſe primary and occult properties of matter, by which ſome philoſophers pretend to account for the production of the wonderful and harmonious ſyſtem of the univerſe.

In many philoſophical diſſertations and theories, our thinking faculty is, in my opinion, treated with too little reſpect. Some have been ſo much afraid of honouring it, that they will not admit it for

for a *ſimple* and diſtinct principle, when treating on the immortality of the ſoul; nor will they conſider it as a *univerſal* principle, when the ſubject is the belief in the exiſtence of a God.

It is indeed very ſtrange, that theſe philoſophers wiſh to compoſe a ſoul endowed with the moſt ſublime qualities, from inert matter, which has no relation to thought; and at the ſame time pretend, that the world, in which we ſee beings capable of thinking, has not been formed and ſuſtained by ſome ſuperior thought, or Intelligent Principle. To ſuppoſe that it had, would be as reaſonable as the other is improbable: But it would appear, that they chuſe rather to conſider the order of nature as the reſult of confuſion, than of previous order and deſign.

When we endeavour to penetrate the ſecret of the formation of the univerſe,—when we reflect on the origin and cauſe of that vaſt and magnificent ſtructure, ſhall we not think of attributing to its firſt principle, what appears moſt marvellous within our ſphere of knowledge, and moſt analogous to ſuch a compoſition,—thought, deſign, and will? Why would we deny theſe ſublime properties to the Grand Cauſe which produced the world? Are we to be ſparing in an hypotheſis which includes all the wonders of nature? Man is become maſter of the earth by means of his intellectual faculties: By them, he has ſubjugated ferocious animals,—conquered the

elements, and found a ſhelter from their impetuoſity: By theſe faculties, man formed the ſocial laws,—put a neceſſary check on his paſſions, and improved all his means of happineſs; In ſhort, nothing has ever been done or invented without the aid of his mind; yet in his ſpeculations on the formation of the univerſe, Will he not admit, or will he dare to reject, the action of intelligence and thought? This would be like men diſputing about the means employed in building a pyramid, who ſhould name all ſorts of inſtruments, except thoſe which they ſaw lying at the foot of the edifice.

Habit alone turns our attention from the aſſemblage of wonders which compoſes our ſoul; and thus, unhappily, admiration, that vivid light of the mind and feelings, does not afford us more inſtruction. Ah! what different emotions would the inconſiderate feel, were they to contemplate, for the firſt time, the ſmalleſt part of this admirable whole! How ſoon, by this means, would the belief of the exiſtence of a God appear rational and probable to thoſe who are, at preſent, becoming daily more eſtranged from that ſublime thought! In order to illuſtrate this truth, let us examine a detached part of our moral conſtitution. Let us then fancy, for a moment, that men ſhould become as immoveable as plants, but retaining certain ſenſes, the power of reflection, and the faculty of judging and of communicating

nicating their thoughts. Were we to hear theſe animated trees diſcourſe amongſt themſelves on the origin of the world, and on the firſt cauſe of all the wonderful phenomena in Nature, they might, no doubt, advance various hypotheſes, as we do, on the fortuitous movement of atoms,—the infinity of chances,—and the laws of fatality or blind neceſſity. Amongſt other arguments employed to controvert the exiſtence of a God, that which would have moſt weight with them muſt be, 'That it is impoſſible to conceive how 'an idea ſhould be changed into a reality, and 'how a ſimple deſign to arrange the parts, and 'put them in motion, ſhould have any influence 'on the execution: For the will,' ſay they, 'being a mere wiſh,—a thought without the 'leaſt power, has no poſſible means of metamor-'phoſing itſelf into action: Thus,' continue thoſe reaſoning plants, 'it would be in vain for 'us, who are immoveable ſpectators of the works 'of nature, to wiſh for a change of ſituation, or 'to deſire to approach each other,—to raiſe de-'fences againſt the impetuoſity of the winds, and 'the ſcorching rays of the ſun; for ſuch wiſhes 'would be altogether fruitleſs:' They would therefore conclude, 'That it would be evi-'dently abſurd to imagine, that any faculty 'could exiſt, which appears ſo abſolutely contra-'ry to the immutable nature of things.'

Suppoſe, however, that in the midſt of this converſation, they ſhould be interrupted by a ſupernatural voice, or by an angel, who ſhould thus addreſs them: 'What would you think, 'were this wonder, which you regard as an 'impoſſibility, to be executed before your 'eyes;—and were the faculty of acting accord-'ing to your own will, all at once given to 'you?' Struck with aſtoniſhment, they would exclaim, 'We proſtrate ourſelves before thee 'with reverence and gratitude; and from this 'inſtant, without further doubt or heſitation, we 'are convinced that we have attained the ſecret 'of the origin of the world; we will therefore 'ever adore the infinite power of that *Intelli-'gence* which has directed the laws of nature.'

But this phenomenon, which would appear incredible, and even impoſſible, to thoſe who had never been witneſſes of it,—this wonder exiſts,—we ſee it and experience it every moment; and yet the influence of habit, ſo deſtructive of admiration, makes us paſs it over without notice.

The ſuppoſition which I have juſt now made, is equally applicable to the ſudden acquiſition of all the faculties by which we are enabled to communicate our ideas; and indeed to the immediate diſcovery of any one of the intellectual powers. But ſome of thoſe powers are, as it were, ſo blended, with the intimate eſſence of the

the ſoul, that they can no more be diſtinguiſhed from it, than *action* can be ſeparated from *will*, or *will* from *thought*. Others of thoſe wonderful powers are of ſuch a nature, that they cannot be defined; nor could we have any knowledge of their exiſtence, without actually poſſeſſing them. Indeed, had it been poſſible by any means, to have diſcovered *thought* and *intelligence*, without poſſeſſing theſe powers themſelves, the inventors of the various atheiſtical ſyſtems, would certainly have laid hold of this means, as moſt applicable to the compoſition of the univerſe.

We ſhall be led to the ſame reflections, when, without enquiring into the greateſt wonders of our nature, we limit our inquiries to that period at which the action of the human mind becomes evident. To illuſtrate this obſervation, let us follow a man of genius in the courſe of his labours: Let us obſerve how he comprehends, at one glance, an immenſe number of ideas, compares them, notwithſtanding their diſtance, and deduces from them a diſtinct reſult, proper to direct his public or private conduct: Let us ſee how he extends and multiplies theſe firſt combinations, and connects them in a wonderful manner to certain points, which his imagination has fixed in the vaſt regions of futurity; and how, by means of theſe magical ſuccours, he approaches, in thought, to a time which does not yet exiſt: Let us view him, in his career, availing himſelf of

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an immenſe diverſity of knowledge, more ſubtle than the rays of the ſun, and yet diſtinguiſhed with admirable preciſion,—more light and fleeting than the vapours of the morning, yet ſtill ſubject to that aſtoniſhing power which, under the name of *memory*, lays up in ſtore the acquiſitions of the mind, in order to be aſſiſted by them in future purſuits: Let us further aſk this man of genius, while he commits to writing his various reflections, How he knows, at once, that ſuch or ſuch a thought is new, or that the ſtyle of a particular paſſage has an original turn? Let us conſider how, in order to form this judgment, he can with ſuch rapidity recapitulate the thoughts and figures of ſpeech employed by others in former times,—where he can place thoſe regiſters which he muſt conſult,—and how he can, in an inſtant, be certainly perſuaded that he has, in a manner, ſurpaſſed all that has been thought or written in preceding ages. In ſhort, let every one contemplate thoſe myſterious beauties of the human underſtanding, and, according to his ability, endeavour to account for them; let him then enquire what impreſſion he receives from ſuch reflections. There is not, perhaps, ſo great a diſtance between the moſt perfect vegetable and the human mind, as between the human mind and the idea we form of the infinite intelligence of the Supreme Being. To be convinced of this, it may be ſufficient to ſuppoſe,

poſe, that there exiſts in the immenſity which ſurrounds us, a gradation ſimilar to what we obſerve in the ſmall ſpace we are permitted to view.

The author of a celebrated work blames mankind, becauſe they have always had a reference to their own faculties, in the compariſons they make, while they endeavour to inveſtigate the firſt principle of the exiſtence of the world. But at what other point can we commence, when we are to reaſon and judge? Is it not enough, that the idea of a Supreme Being is metaphyſical? Shall we endeavour to abſtract ourſelves, and attempt to find an imaginary ſupport to our opinions and judgments, which may be exterior to us, and abſolutely foreign to our nature? This is altogether incomprehenſible. We pretend not to have ſufficient powers to know the eſſence and perfections of God; but by purſuing ſuch abſtractions, we only deprive ourſelves of the few means we poſſeſs. It is indeed very neceſſary, that we ſhould judge of things we do not know, by the aſſiſtance of thoſe we are acquainted with. We are always led aſtray, when we ſeek to take any other courſe: Yet ſome philoſophers have ſtriven to combat our internal feelings by abſtract and arbitrary ideas, of which a capricious imagination is the only foundation.

Thus it muſt be always ſurpriſing, that amidſt our contemplations and habits of thinking, while

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we perceive the wiſdom of deſign, the general harmony, and all the traces of intelligence in nature, we ſhould, all at once, renounce this mode of judging and thinking, that we may attribute the formation of the world to the effect of chance, or to the laws of blind neceſſity; and it is impoſſible that we can deduce from this the ſame conſequences with regard to the admirable order of the univerſe:—All muſt appear in confuſion without plan or deſign. Facts ſo different, principles ſo contrary, cannot lead to the ſame concluſion. The magnificence which appears in the univerſe, ought to be taken into conſideration, when we form conjectures on its origin; and we cannot be eaſily perſuaded that, in the inveſtigation of ſuch important truths, we ſhould hold of no account all the ideas we acquire by viewing the wonders of nature. It would be indeed going a great length, were men to reject all arguments drawn from final cauſes; it would not be merely one prolific thought alone they would thus deſtroy,—they would entirely cut off the ſource of all our knowledge.

The various wonders of nature being all diſplayed to us, as it were, at one view, we inſenſibly ceaſe to perceive their connection with the exiſtence of a God: But if the Great Ruler of the univerſe had thought fit to exhibit ſucceſſively the numerous acts of his power, our imagination, being animated by the frequent change

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of objects, muſt, of neceſſity, have riſen to the idea of a Supreme Being. It is then becauſe a multitude of miracles are accumulated to aggrandize the univerſe,—becauſe an inimitable harmony ſeems to unite the immenſe diverſity of parts into an admirable whole,—becauſe profound wiſdom maintains a general equilibrium, and, in ſhort, becauſe inſenſible gradations and delicate ſhades, render the wonderous works of nature more perfect, that men are not immediately ſtruck with aſtoniſhment, and loſt in admiration.

Perhaps you may ſay, that new phenomena would be requiſite to determine your belief.—— But have you then forgot, that all you at preſent behold, ſurpaſſes your underſtanding? Alas! were the ſmalleſt miracle performed before your eyes, you would inſtantly be ready to bend your haughty reaſon; and yet, becauſe the greateſt and moſt wonderful that can poſſibly be conceived, has preceded your exiſtence, you affect to remain unconcerned, and pretend that all appears ſimple and neceſſary! But what influence has your momentary contemplations on the reality of the wonders in the univerſe? Your paſſage through life, is an imperceptible point amidſt the view of eternity: Admiration, ſurpriſe, and all the affections of the ſoul, do not alter the nature of the phenomena which are their objects; and the mind, like a mirror, can only

only reflect a very ſmall portion of the immenſe proſpect of the univerſe.

Neither do we need any new revolution in the order of nature, to convince us of the power of its Author: The texture of a blade of graſs far ſurpaſſes our intelligence: And when we have grown old in ſtudy and obſervation, we may ſtill diſcover new objects, and new relations, which we have not inveſtigated. We are, indeed, every where ſurrounded with things unknown and incomprehenſible.

Let us, however, for a moment, ſuppoſe that there exiſted ſuch miracles as might immediately convince us; yet it is plain, that they would not have ſo much influence on the opinions of men, as ſome people have imagined: For if they were frequently repeated, and occurred periodically at equal intervals, their firſt impreſſion would be gradually weakened, and they would, at laſt, be conſidered merely as one of the ſucceſſive movements of eternal matter. On the contrary, if theſe miracles appeared only at very diſtant periods, poſterior generations would accuſe their anceſtors, who were witneſſes of them, of weakneſs and credulity; or perhaps they would queſtion the authenticity of thoſe traditions, which tranſmitted the accounts of revolutions contrary to the common courſe of nature.

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It may perhaps be ſtill ſaid, That in order to be certain of the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, it would be neceſſary to demonſtrate that the Deity always liſtens to the prayers addreſſed to Him. But though our prayers and wiſhes could conſtantly influence events in general, Would that be ſufficient to change the opinion of thoſe who behold, with indifference, that innumerable multitude of actions which are ſo miraculouſly ſubjected to our will? Would they not ſtill find ſome pretence for conſidering ſuch an increaſe of power, as a neceſſary reſult of the eternal ſyſtem of the univerſe? Thus, however great were the degree of intelligence granted to us,—however numerous the prodigies accumulated around us, we might ſtill oppoſe the ſame objections and the ſame doubts, that ſome men have audaciouſly raiſed amidſt all thoſe wonders which we daily witneſs. It is difficult, nay even impoſſible, to make a laſting impreſſion on thoſe men who are only ſuſceptible of aſtoniſhment, at the moment when they paſs from what is known to what is unknown: For their emotion only continues for an inſtant; and the endurance of their admiration depends on the ſlowneſs of their inſtruction, or on the continual ſucceſſion of new phenomena preſented to their view. Perhaps we might be more ſtruck with our own powers and faculties, if, in order to make our actions obedient to our will, it were neceſſary to give

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our orders repeatedly, and pronounce them with an audible voice, as a captain commands his ſoldiers: Yet ſuch a conſtitution would be leſs wonderful, becauſe leſs perfect, than that which we poſſeſs.

Let us now obviate another objection. Some philoſophers have ſaid, That men advance gradually and ſlowly in their diſcoveries of the original principles which regulate the operations of nature: The power of attraction, that great phyſical agent, has been only known about a century,—and the doctrine of electricity is a more recent diſcovery: Every age, indeed every year, adds to the ſtore of our knowledge; and the time will perhaps come, when, without having recourſe to any myſterious opinions, we may be enabled to explain all thoſe phenomena which, at preſent, ſo much aſtoniſh us.

Thoſe who reaſon in this manner, do not immediately perceive the neceſſity of eſtabliſhing a firſt cauſe, from which all the great principles and important truths proceed, that have been already diſcovered, or may hereafter enrich the human mind: For the farther we are able to trace the links of the vaſt chain which connects the parts of the univerſe, the more we muſt extend our view of the magnificent work and power of the Creator. A train of ſucceſsful labour, may perhaps enable us to diſcover ſome ſecret phyſical property, of ſuperior influence to any

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we already know: But even ſuppoſing that all the operations of nature were ſubjected to a few general laws, and that we were able to diſcover theſe laws; ſuch a reſult of our enquiries would merely ſhow, that there exiſts a more extenſive unity in the ſyſtem of nature; and this ſimplicity,—this additional character of perfection, would excite, if poſſible, a higher degree of admiration: For, in a complicated work, ſuch as the world, the ſimple and regular dependence of the parts, announces the wiſdom and ſkill of the Artiſt; and, in no caſe whatever, can we admire an incoherent maſs, where the connection of the parts is every where broken: But by ſome unaccountable habit, when men have diſcovered a principle that appears uniform in its action, and have beſtowed on it a particular denomination, they inconſiderately conclude that their admiration ſhould then ceaſe. In fact, enquiries into the admirable powers of attraction, electricity, and chemical affinity, are, at preſent, leſs the object of purſuit, than the diſcovery of ſome means to free us from the admiration due to the ſtupendous effects of thoſe wonderful properties. Indeed we become habituated to view with indifference, every general effect, and every primary cauſe, of which we have a conception, without conſidering that that very *conception* is one of the moſt ſurpriſing phenomena in nature. It may be ſaid, that men, from a familiarity

with their own minds, contemn what may be eaſily comprehended: That emulation, and competition with others, can alone ſtimulate their vanity; but when they judge of themſelves individually, or when they take a general view of mankind, they conceive ſo mean an opinion of themſelves, that every ſecret which the human mind is able to comprehend, ſeems no longer worthy of their admiration.

The account of the formation of the earth, which is given by M. BUFFON, may be conſidered as the moſt extenſive, and the moſt elegant theory ever offered on that ſubject. But, ſuppoſing it were as juſt as it is beautiful, it can only enable us to explain *one* of the magnificent combinations in the univerſe,—*one* gradation of that ſuperb work. I ſee the earth formed by an emanation from the ſun,—I ſee it become fertile, and teem with animation, in proportion as it is ſlowly cooled, to a due degree of temperature,—I ſee all the beauties of nature ſpring from its boſom; and what is more wonderful than all, creatures endowed with inſtinct and intelligence: But if the *elements* of thoſe incomprehenſible productions, have been prepared and depoſited in the great fountain of light, which animates the world, I muſt there transfer my aſtoniſhment,—and I muſt ſtill ſeek for the Author of ſo many wonders.

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I come now to conſider, as briefly as poſſible, the moſt metaphyſical part of my ſubject. We might perhaps be able to form ſome idea of a world exiſting without beginning, by the laws of blind neceſſity, were that world fixed and invariable in all its parts: But how ſhall we conſider all thoſe ſucceſſive changes, which conſtantly recur, to be eternal? Such a ſucceſſion is neceſſarily compoſed of an end and a beginning; and we cannot, in any other terms, explain the nature of ſucceſſive change. Thus we are conſtrained to raiſe our thoughts to a Self Exiſting Firſt Cauſe, when we contemplate a perpetual ſucceſſion of cauſes and effects,—of deſtruction and reproduction,—of death and life. We cannot even imagine the moſt ſimple movement to exiſt without a beginning: For every motion depends on diſplacing a body from a ſituation in which it remained *previouſly* at reſt.

It would not remove the difficulty, though it were aſſerted, that the univerſe is immoveable,—and that its parts alone are ſubjected to variation: For a whole of this kind, conſidered abſtractly, without any relation, real or imaginary, to its parts, is a mere ideal circumſcription, ſuppoſed unſuſceptible of change: But this circumſcription can only conſiſt of thoſe poſitive things which are contained within its limits. It is only by ſtudying theſe, and examining the various parts of the unknown whole, to which we give

the name of the univerſe, that we can, with certainty, deduce conſequences, or form judgments. We have therefore juſt reaſon to conclude, from obſerving the perpetual ſucceſſions and revolutions in nature, that there muſt neceſſarily exiſt a Firſt Cauſe.

Here it may be ſaid, that we encounter the ſame difficulty, by ſuppoſing the eternity of a God: For the concatenation of deſigns in an Intelligent Being, ought to lead to a commencement, as well as the *ſucceſſions* of the phyſical world.

This difficulty, like all others whoſe ſolution depends on the knowledge of infinity, cannot be eaſily obviated. It is evident, however, that every phyſical ſeries conducts us, in a ſimple and direct manner, to the neceſſity of a firſt principle; and that we muſt not expect to find it in matter, ſince the properties of material objects can afford us no idea whatever of ſuch a principle. On the contrary, a ſucceſſion of intellectual combinations may be referred to an origin, which we are able to ſuppoſe may be connected, in ſome way or other, with intelligence. In ſhort, we can readily form a conception of poſſeſſing the faculty of thinking, previous to the action of thought; and we may ſuppoſe them ſeparated by any poſſible interval. In this manner, we may be conſcious of the intellectual faculty of *liberty*, at a period when we make no

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uſe of it, and when it remains in a ſtate of abſolute inactivity.

I may alſo add, that if our thoughts are ſometimes dependent one on another, yet the ſeries is ſo often interrupted, that our ideas frequently appear to ariſe from no cauſe whatever: On the contrary, in all other productions within our knowledge, there is a conſtant and immediate relation between the effect and its cauſe. Nor ſhould we leave out of view, that, when our ideas appear depending on each other, ſuch a ſucceſſion is rather a conſequence of our weakneſs and ignorance, than of the nature of *thought*, conſidered in the abſtract. Our means being circumſcribed, we are obliged to proceed continually from what is known to what is unknown,—from what is probable to what is certain,—from experience of the paſt, to conjectures on the future: But ſuch a procedure is abſolutely foreign to a boundleſs intelligence, which ſees and knows all things at one glance; and perhaps we may, in ſome meaſure, find this truth illuſtrated, even amongſt men, when we compare the natural and happy facility of true genius, with the painful and unavailing ſtruggles of dulneſs.

In ſhort, thoſe perſons who are convinced of the exiſtence of a God, need not tranſport themſelves, if I may uſe the expreſſion, beyond the domain of thought, in order to find proofs to

ſupport their opinion: Atheiſts alone need to make ſuch wild excurſions; ſince they alone wiſh to reſiſt the influence of our moſt intimate feelings, and moſt natural ideas,—ſince they bid us miſtruſt the diſtinct connection we perceive between the Supreme Intelligence and the perfection of order,—between a firſt principle, and a ſeries of cauſes and effects,—between the idea of a God and all the propenſities of the ſoul: Theſe obvious conſiderations are the ſure foundation of our opinions. Thus we ſtill retain the advantage, though it were true, that, when we ſtrive to aſcend the inacceſſible heights of metaphyſics, our adverſaries were on an equal footing with us.

Purſuing this ſimple train of thought, and deſirous to treat my ſubject with ſuch a degree of perſpicuity as to render theſe reflections of general utility, I decline entering on a further diſcuſſion of the various theories that have been advanced with regard to the creation of the world. It ſuffices, that, in general, I perceive the idea of a *creation* to be no more incomprehenſible than that of the *eternity* of the univerſe. The laſt hypotheſis, no doubt, renders it unneceſſary to conceive that *ſomething* has been produced by *nothing;* but the ſubſtitution of an *eternal exiſtence*, in place of *nothing*, is, in every reſpect, as perplexing to the imagination. For the mind, being unable to reach the thought of eternity, muſt

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ever place it amidſt a vacuity, when attempting to comprehend it. In the ſyſtem of a Created Univerſe, we ſee *ſomething* proceed from *nothing*, by an *Intelligent Will*, of which we can form a clear idea; but in the ſyſtem of an Eternal Univerſe, we can only get rid of this *nothing*, by means of an abſtraction which overpowers all our faculties. Indeed, both theſe modes of exiſtence ſeem to be placed, as it were, in a boundleſs void, beyond the reach of the human mind: And if we ſometimes fancy, that the eternal exiſtence of the univerſe is a more agreeable thought than its creation, the only reaſon appears to be, that ſuch a ſuppoſition excludes all examination, and ſuperſedes the uſe of all our reaſoning powers.

The idea of a God the Creator of the univerſe, is no doubt equally *above* our intelligence: But we are led towards it by all our moſt intimate feelings; and thoſe obſtacles which we encounter in our endeavours to reach this grand idea, we can readily aſcribe to the *will* of that Omnipotent Being for whom we ſearch. On the contrary, in the dull and uniform path of the *eternal exiſtence of the univerſe*, we are immediately oppreſſed with deſpair, when we find it impoſſible to diſcover the nature of things, yet cannot ſuſpect that there is a veil interpoſed to conceal it from our inveſtigation.

I will add a few more obſervations. We behold a faint reſemblance of the creation, in the

continual reproduction of the rich fruits of the earth. Our moral nature affords a more ſtriking repreſentation of it, in the formation of ideas which had no antecedent exiſtence. Our feelings are another indication of the ſame truth; for they have no evident connection with any of the cauſes to which we aſſign them: Thus, were we not influenced by habit, we would perceive as wide a difference between particular exterior occurrences, and the correſpondent feelings they excite, as between the exiſtence of the world and the idea of an Infinite and Omnipotent Power.

We alſo perceive that the univerſe bears all the evident marks of a *Work*,—the characteriſtic of which is, The union of a multitude of parts, whoſe relations are determined agreeably to one general plan. In ſhort, even the ſucceſſion of time ſuggeſts the exiſtence of an intelligent cauſe: For how can we reconcile ſuch a ſucceſſion with the eternity of nature? We can conceive no different periods in an extent which has no beginning; ſince each of theſe periods muſt comprehend an infinite ſpace. Beſides, the want of a beginning, conſidered abſtractly, renders intermediate ſubdiviſions impoſſible; for we can form no ideas of any ſuch ſubdiviſions, without two determinate limits, with the one of which we may begin, and terminate with the other. Thus the introduction of paſt, preſent and future, amidſt the

the perpetuity of time, ſeems to be the operation of an Intelligent Power, who has planned this immenſe uniformity, and who governs the univerſal nature of things.

I need not dwell longer on theſe reflections; for it is unneceſſary to conceive of the creation, or of the nature of things, in a metaphyſical ſenſe, in order to eſtabliſh the baſis of our religious principles: It is ſufficient that we believe in the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, the Ruler of Nature,—the perfect Model of Wiſdom and Goodneſs,—the Protector and Guardian of rational beings,—and the Univerſal Diſpoſer of all events. Our reaſoning powers become enfeebled, when we endeavour to ſtretch our thoughts too far, and ſtrive to explain thoſe ſecrets, that lie concealed beyond our ſphere of knowledge. In that caſe, we can only oppoſe the adverſaries of Religion, by preſenting, as it were, the ſlender extremity of our arguments,—the laſt feeble exertion of reaſoning, when exhauſted by its own efforts. It will then be better to rely on ſuch principles as may be defended by the joint force of our reaſon and feelings. Let us not heſitate to confeſs, that our nobleſt faculties are reſtrained by certain and invariable limits: One degree more of intellectual power, would perhaps diffuſe a ſudden light over thoſe difficulties which at preſent appear quite inſuperable. There are few perſons, habituated to deep thought, who have

have not, perhaps, experienced a pre-ſentiment of this truth: For the imagination ſometimes diſcovers, as it were, the firſt glimmerings of a new percipient power, which, we fondly imagine, could we advance but one ſtep farther, would be within our reach; but after vainly graſping at it, our hope fails, and we muſt return to a humble ſenſe of our weakneſs. Alas! in that infinite ſpace through which our imagination ranges, we find only a boundleſs waſte, where the mind diſcovers no haven, no place of repoſe. One may fancy, that the celeſtial guards have deſolated thoſe regions, that no audacious traveller may ever hope to paſs their bourne. But ſhall we venture to aſſert, that the myſteries of nature ceaſe, at the point where our intelligence terminates? Would we preſumptuouſly dare to enter into the ſecrets of time, by aſcribing eternal exiſtence to every thing we know! How vain-glorious, how inſignificant do we appear, when we, who are creatures of a moment, arrogantly pretend to decide on thoſe things which pertain to eternity!

It ſeems indeed, very probable, that the degree of reaſon we poſſeſs, is not ſufficient to attain the explanation of thoſe myſteries which curioſity leads us to inveſtigate. The long ſeries of animated beings inferior to us, to all of whom our intellectual faculties are unknown, may afford us a ſtrong analogous proof of this fact:

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And it muſt appear ſtrange, that though we diſtinctly perceive the boundaries of our ſenſes, we never reflect that our *intelligence*, which we fancy to be boundleſs, may, notwithſtanding, be really circumſcribed within certain limits. The imagination, indeed, often goes beyond the known bounds of nature: But we are unable to advance farther than the entrance of that domain which muſt be explored, before we can penetrate the occult ſecrets of nature: We cannot, however, doubt, that ſome Intelligence muſt exiſt, capable of comprehending all theſe myſteries. Omniſcience muſt be at the top of this ſcale of intelligence—at the ſummit of this gradation, which we are permitted, in part, to trace. We can only gain knowledge, and make diſcoveries, by the help of experiment and obſervation, and we only judge of nature from the narrow fore-ground expoſed to our view. But ſhall we therefore ſuppoſe, that no other mode of acquiring knowledge exiſts in the univerſe? Men, in forming their judgments and opinions, very much reſemble children; and their weakneſs and ignorance ought continually to remind them that they need a *Father* and a *Guide*. We alſo ſee that all the phenomena of nature are related to one great whole,—all its various productions united to ſome general cauſe. The ſame thing may be obſerved of the human ſoul; but, more admirable than the rays of the ſun, it is an emanation from the pureſt light,—from

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the Divine Mind. In ſhort, ſince we know that ſpace and time have no bounds, yet ſee that they are ſubjected to diviſion, Why ſhall we not believe, that the ſmall degree of knowledge we poſſeſs, may be a part of a Univerſal Intelligence?

THE weakeſt of all objections againſt the belief of the exiſtence of a God, is, in my opinion, that which has been founded on the common remark, That human life is chequered with pain and pleaſure. A God, ſay the oppoſers of Religion, ought to be incapable of the ſmalleſt imperfection; and we cannot believe in his exiſtence, while we perceive any limits to his power and goodneſs.

This is a very feeble argument: For, while they refuſe to admit the evidence of the exiſtence of a God, afforded by the wiſdom, harmony and intelligence diſplayed in the ſyſtem of the univerſe, What right have they to avail themſelves of an imaginary contraſt, between *infinite power* and *infinite goodneſs*, in order to attribute the formation of the world to the caprice of chance, or to the laws of blind neceſſity? Would it be reaſonable to conſider the defects of a work, as an evidence againſt the exiſtence of the artiſt, while the beauties of that work are not admitted as a proof of a contrary opinion? Indeed, if we would argue juſtly, we muſt abſolutely invert this mode of reaſoning; for

for diſorder and imperfection being merely a negation of certain qualities, unleſs the whole appears defective, we cannot reject the idea of an intelligent cauſe; on the contrary, in order to confirm our belief of ſuch a cauſe, it is ſufficient that one part of the object we contemplate, announces art and deſign. Thus, while we view a palace, if we diſcover in the compoſition ſome evident marks of ingenuity, we immediately attribute theſe to the ſkill of the architect, though we may, at the ſame time, obſerve other parts of the edifice, in which no beauty nor invention appear.

We have already ſhown to what abſurd extremes we may be carried, by attempting to reconcile infinite Power with infinite Goodneſs; and we need not dwell much longer on that ſubject. We have ſeen that there can be no hypotheſis propoſed, nor even conceived, after which we might not ſay, That infinite Power ought to have produced ſomething more perfect. Some ideas appear contradictory in our judgment, only becauſe our mind cannot comprehend their whole extent; and we find this obſervation verified, not only when we contemplate things foreign to our nature, but even when we conſider thoſe things with which we are daily converſant: But how contemptible do men appear, when they pretend to confine within their narrow comprehenſion, the greateſt and moſt unlimited of all thoughts?

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Will they preſume to employ the idea of infinite Power, to overturn our belief of infinite Goodneſs,—the idea of infinite Wiſdom, to aboliſh the exiſtence of infinite Power? By the notion of *infinite chance* too, men have invented many abſurd theories with regard to the formation of the world. Thus, they would employ infinity for every purpoſe, but that of placing over us a Supreme Intelligence, poſſeſſing an eſſence and properties beyond the reach of our reaſon.

Since our thoughts are loſt in a boundleſs maze, as ſoon as we attempt to ſurpaſs the limits of our intellectual faculties; when we wiſh to call up all the powers and feelings of our ſoul, to awake in our heart, a lively conviction of the exiſtence of a God, we ought, by no means, to exhauſt our ſtrength in following mere ſubtilities, or in vainly endeavouring to acquire a full and preciſe idea of the various attributes of that Infinite Being, who has permitted us to know Him, by His works, in a certain degree, and no further. It would, indeed, be rather hard, thus to oblige perſons who believe in and adore a God, to defend themſelves, both againſt thoſe who deny His exiſtence, and thoſe who idly diſpute about the nature of His perfections. I am far from ſuppoſing that any obſtacle could be oppoſed to the Divine Will;—but though I were convinced that there exiſts a certain order, and certain laws in the univerſe, which the Deity can modify, but not

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entirely ſubvert, yet ſtill I would retain my preſent ſentiments of Religion. I would no leſs adore the Supreme Being, if I ſhould find reaſon to think, that, though in him all perfections were conſtantly united, he yet choſe to advance the happineſs of his creatures, only by ſlow degrees. I would ſilently venerate thoſe ſecrets that elude my penetration, and humbly wait for the time when thoſe clouds may be diſpelled, with which they are at preſent enveloped. What! ſome may here exclaim, Do you ſtill talk of ignorance and obſcurity? Yes, always,—and ſuch will ever be the lot of thoſe who attempt to ſurpaſs the limits preſcribed by the immutable laws of nature. But ſuch truths as we can clearly perceive and comprehend, are fully ſufficient to regulate our conduct, and direct our paths to happineſs. Every thing indicates, every thing announces, THAT THERE IS A GOD; though we can neither diſcover the myſtery of His eſſence, nor the relations of His perfections. We ſee, at a diſtance, the monarch ſurrounded by his guards,—we know his laws, and enjoy the advantages they produce; but we enter not into his counſels, nor are we made acquainted with his deliberations. We even perceive that an impenetrable veil covers from us the deſigns of the Supreme Being; and ſince we can never hope to remove it, let us repoſe with confidence on the protection of that Eternal Being, who is in-

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finitely Powerful and Good,—let us commit ourſelves to Him, as we would to a friend, who, while we ſtood, amidſt profound darkneſs, upon the brink of a hideous precipice, ſhould reſcue us from deſtruction, and ſoothe our terror.

If we may venture, with reverence, to make the compariſon, we might ſay, that the Deity is like the Sun, on which we cannot gaze ſtedfaſtly; but when we turn aſide our looks, we enjoy the benefit of that light which he diffuſes throughout all nature. Yet man, who, from a conſciouſneſs of his ignorance and incapacity, can only approach the Supreme Being, by veneration and awful reſpect, ought, on that account, to be more deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of His Infinite Majeſty. The force of the lever is always greateſt when it is acted on at the furtheſt extremity.

The univerſal aſſent of mankind, in all nations and in all ages, muſt be allowed to afford a ſtrong preſumptive evidence of the exiſtence of a God: But the full force of this proof cannot be perceived, unleſs we conſider, as an eſtabliſhed law of our moral nature, that inſtinctive tendency towards this ſublime thought, which ſeems ſo conſtantly remarkable in the human mind, notwithſtanding the immenſe diſparity of knowledge and capacity amongſt mankind. This leads us to conclude, that, amid the obſcurity in which the idea of a God is involved,

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our internal feelings become our ſureſt guide. Theſe, I confeſs, form that part of our moral nature which appears to be leaſt dependent on reaſon; but ſuch innate perceptions ſeem to me, on that account, to have the moſt immediate communication with the Author of Nature.

Sight excels our other ſenſes by its amazing celerity; but imagination is ſtill more active, and carries us farther than ſight. Imagination, however, is obliged to trace out for itſelf a path; and is therefore inferior to our intuitive perceptions and feelings, which, without any intermediate aid, bring us directly to the point.

The efforts of reaſoning to reach profound metaphyſical truths, may be conſidered as a chain of which the links ſucceed, but are not connected with each other; becauſe the mind of man is incapable, in ſuch reſearches, of comprehending the multitude of ideas, which muſt be united before a juſt concluſion can be attained. Our feelings are then beſt ſuited to conduct us in our ſearch after thoſe ſublime truths, which are, in their nature, ſimple and indiviſible, and can be moſt readily apprehended at one view. Beſides, while he who poſſeſſes erudition and a refined genius, often wanders in the labyrinths of metaphyſics, and purſues vain ſpeculations, the plain and upright man, who is ſtill governed by the laws of nature, feels the belief of a Supreme Being, ſpontaneouſly ſpring up in his breaſt. Thus ſenſibi-

lity as well as intelligence announces to us the exiſtence of a Supreme Being; and we cannot know Him without loving Him. This union, then, of all our faculties to that ſublime idea, which ſeems to be inſtinctive, ought to be referred to a firſt cauſe; for there muſt certainly exiſt a firſt model of all things, ſince nothing proceeds abſolutely from ourſelves.

It may, perhaps, be an innate, though indiſtinct, perception of this firſt model, that always reminds us of religious ſentiments, when we contemplate any uncommon example of eminent virtue. Were it not for the pleaſing hopes and agreeable reflections, which excite in our breaſts a deep and heartfelt admiration, the unhappy theories of philoſophers might unhinge, or even deſtroy all our beſt principles: But in vain would they attempt to perſuade us, that ſenſibility is the accidental production of blind matter. All we feel within us declares it to have a nobler origin. Ah! who ſees not amidſt all theſe wonderous properties of man, the grandeur of the ſoul,—the elevation of genius,—the expanſive glow of ſenſibility,—the conſtant love of order, and gentle benevolence,—who ſees not, in this brilliant group, the reflection of a divine light! On contemplating this proſpect, who can doubt, that there ſomewhere exiſts a ſource of all this greatneſs, beauty and intelligence! Could rays appear without a fountain of light? While I purſue ſuch a train of thought,

thought, I ſometimes fancy that that exalted virtue, which we muſt all admire, may be, as it were, the firſt ſtep towards bringing intelligent creatures to the knowledge of the Sovereign Author of Nature; and when ſuch admirable virtue is found united in certain perſons with a love and pre-ſentiment of the divine nature, that union irreſiſtibly commands our reſpect and veneration. Thus, every good and ſublime ſentiment ſeems to be awaked, when we form an idea of the ſoul of SOCRATES or FENELON.

From a ſimilar cauſe, we feel regret, when we reflect, that ſome ingenious men are enemies to theſe ſublime ideas,—men who wiſh rather to debaſe themſelves, and all nature beſide, by attributing their origin to chance or blind neceſſity, than to conſider their intellectual faculties as a faint ſhadow of Sovereign Intelligence. Thus, inſtead of employing their abilities to ſupport and fortify theſe comfortable truths, they are aſſiduous in oppoſing them; and endeavour to embarraſs, by ſubtle arguments, thoſe ſimple inſtructions which tend to cheriſh our firſt and moſt natural hopes. They ſeem, of their own accord, if we may ſpeak ſo, to wiſh rather to materialize themſelves, than to exalt their minds, and lead us by their ingenuity into the paths of hope and felicity. They will only grant eternity to the *duſt* from which, they ſay, they are ſprung, but will not allow it to *mind* and *thought*.

What honour do they expect to derive from this ſuperior knowledge of which they boaſt, if it be only the reſult of an accretion of parts, like the growth of plants,—if our intellectual faculties, inſtead of being intimately connected with an Infinite Intelligence, and a noble deſtiny, are altogether dependent on this frail ſtructure, this ſlender fabric, which is every moment expoſed to the hazard of diſſolution? What glory can we expect from thoſe faculties, if they can extend no farther than the ſmall, the imperceptible point of time, between our birth and our death,—if they can only exalt us above our fellow mortals during the ſhort period of human life,—that inſtant which will be ſoon loſt in the immenſity of ages, like the fleeting vapour amid the expanſe of air? Ah! how can we boaſt of fame, precedency and high birth, while we would voluntarily renounce the grandeur of the nobleſt origin? Can we be proud of the celebrity of our country, the honour of our nation, and the renown of our family, and ſhall we, at the ſame time, reject the only true dignity of our nature, which extends to the whole human race?

In ſhort, I would aſk every one who poſſeſſes the ſmalleſt ſhare of ſenſibility, By what ſtrange deviation of imagination it is, that he can poſſibly carry his ſcruples with regard to the exiſtence of a Deity farther than mere *doubt*? For we feel that our only guide and ſupport in all our deter-

determinations, is our intelligence, of which the weakneſs and fallibility is every moment ſo obvious. That intelligence is alſo capable of gradual improvement, and of making conſtant new acquiſitions. Now, as there is no proportion between the degree of our intelligence and the profound myſteries of nature, we every where behold, How can we boldly aſſert, that men have already arrived at the ultimate prefection of ſcience? How ſhall we venture to affirm, that nothing exiſts, or can exiſt, through eternity, ſuperior in penetration to our weak reaſon?

However, ſuppoſing even that we ſhould deſpair of advancing farther in metaphyſics, and that we ſtill find the proofs of the exiſtence of a God to be inſufficient, Is there any other ſyſtem which is not more involved in obſcurity, and which does not terminate in doubt? But have we conſidered the effect of ſimple *probability*, when applied to ſublime and boundleſs ideas? Let us figure to ourſelves, a circumſtance equally probable, on which the moſt intereſting occurrence of our preſent life abſolutely depends, and we may conceive what effect that degree of probability ought to have, in the proportion of finite to infinite. Thus, not merely a probability, but the ſlighteſt preſumption, of the exiſtence of a God, ought to ſatisfy men of ſenſe, that it is proper for mankind to embrace a ſyſtem of religion. Yes, even amidſt their doubts, they might

offer up this humble prayer: 'O thou GOD 'unknown! whoſe image is impreſſed on our 'hearts,—whoſe exiſtence we conſtantly feel to 'be eſſentially neceſſary to our happineſs,—If 'Thou ART,—if Thou reigneſt in Heaven,—if 'it is Thy hand which ſupports, and thy wiſdom 'which regulates the univerſe, deign to accept 'our love and humble homage.'——

Theſe reflections might be ſufficient to impreſs with reverential awe, weak beings who are unknown to themſelves,—who ſearch every where for their own origin,—who poſſeſs ſo many deſires and hopes, and who abſolutely need ſome fixed and ruling principle to ſupport their imbecillity, and to ſerve as an anchor amidſt the waverings and agitations of their minds.

Becauſe the period appears diſtant, at which every difficulty will be explained, many perſons exaggerate their doubts, and even confound them with decided unbelief. Let us, however, imagine a time to be appointed, when the inhabitants of the earth ſhall be ſolemnly called together, and inſtructed in the myſteries of their preſent exiſtence and of futurity: Let us ſuppoſe, that the day for this inſtruction were ſignalized by ſome phenomenon which might rouſe our attention: At ſuch a moment, I am certain, that thoſe men who are now, in appearance, moſt averſe to religious ſentiments, would ſuffer the utmoſt uneaſineſs and anxiety, and would ſoon

feel,

feel, that what they formerly conſidered as their true ſentiments, was only a wavering opinion, externally propped up by vain glory, and a deſire of diſtinction.

While I form this judgment of the pretended incredulity of certain perſons, I will venture to ſay, that an unfounded and ſuperficial belief in the exiſtence of a God, and in the truths which depend on that great thought, has often leſs effect on the mind, than even *doubt*, when reſtrained within due bounds: And were the limits of ſuch doubts exactly aſcertained, the religious ſentiments of one claſs of ſociety, might, by that means, acquire more force and ſtability.

Here it may be objected, That this doubt, which ſo many perſons have found irreſiſtible, may be conſidered as an argument againſt the belief of a God. For, ſay the oppoſers of religion, an Infinitely Powerful Being ſhould have been able to inſpire a general and complete conviction of this important truth; there was no need of having recourſe to miracles, or employing any ſupernatural means,—His will ſhould have ſufficed.

I confeſs, that we may eaſily imagine ſeveral degrees of intelligence and happineſs ſuperior to our own: But that faculty of our nature, the motive of which is unknown to us, can never be conſidered as averſe to the belief of a God. Every moral and phyſical power we poſſeſs is circumſcribed by certain limits; but, far beyond theſe,

we, every moment, perceive within us the work of Supreme Intelligence, and the traces of a divine hand: In ſhort, we perceive enough to decide our opinion; ſince the vague reaſonings, founded on a ſuppoſition of what we *might be*, can never be oppoſed to the clear and diſtinct inferences we deduce from a conſideration of what we *really are*.

The Laplander, who dwells amid perpetual ſnow, when, perchance, he hears from his cave, the rolling of diſtant thunder, can ſay, *That God ſtill lives on the high mountain;* and ſhall we, who poſſeſs all the riches of nature, and all the light of philoſophy, reject the belief of a Supreme Being? What perverſion, what abuſe of our reaſon! O Infinity! incomprehenſible thought, which muſt overwhelm the greateſt and moſt daring genius! it belongs to thee, O Infinity! to inſtruct men how diffident they ought to be of their own judgment. Ah! what can they do better, than fall proſtrate before the Great Maſter of the World, and trace, with fervour and humble admiration, that aſtoniſhing chain of wonders and of beauties, which ſeems intended to conduct them to the knowledge of the Author of Nature? What can they do better, in ſhort, than aſpire to the ſublime idea of a God, and ſtrive with all their might to confirm their belief of that opinion, which is not only the moſt probable, but alſo the moſt intereſting, the moſt exalted,

exalted, and the happieſt of all? Alas! were we ever to loſe it,—Who can bear the thought? a horrid gloom would inveſt our feelings, and a diſmal, an eternal ſilence, would ſeem to cover the face of nature. In vain would we look for a protector or a guide,—in vain would we ſeek a foundation for our hopes; but this is not all, a dreadful thought ſtill ſtrikes me, which I forbear for a moment to communicate:—I think, however, that religious ſentiments acquire a new degree of ſtrength, by demonſtrating, that principles repugnant to thoſe opinions, conduct us to concluſions directly contrary to our moſt intimate feelings, and that before we can adopt ſuch principles, we muſt, in a manner, change our nature. I will therefore conclude this chapter with a reflection of the higheſt importance, and worthy of our moſt ſerious attention.

If there be no God,—if the whole univerſe be only the production of chance, or if nature be eternal,—and if this nature be blind, and void of conſciouſneſs, without any ſupreme guide or director,—in ſhort, if all its movements be the effect of its own ſecret properties, a terrific thought alarms our imagination: We would not merely renounce all the charms of hope, and behold the hideous image of death and annihilation advancing towards us,—theſe dreadful anticipations would not terminate our terrors: In ſhort, the revolutions

revolutions of blind matter being abſolutely precarious, and leſs a ſubject of probable conjecture than the deſigns of an Intelligent Being, we could never diſcover any certain foundation on which we might reſt the deſtiny of man. It would be impoſſible to gueſs, whether by ſome imperious laws of nature, intelligent beings might not be devoted to irrevocable perdition, or deſtined to revive under ſome other form,—whether they might hereafter experience unknown pleaſures or eternal pains: Death or life, happineſs or miſery, equally belong to blind nature, when its action is directed by no intelligent moral principle, but merely dependent on the dark property, which is expreſſed by that terrible, though inexplicable word, *neceſſity*. Such a nature would reſemble the rocks, to which Prometheus was bound, in the fable, that were as inſenſible to the agonizing groans of the unhappy ſufferer, as to the joy of the rapacious vultures who preyed on his vitals.

In ſuch a ſyſtem, there would be nothing to fix our opinion with regard to futurity. We might fancy the heavenly fires to be places deſtined for the reception of unhappy animated beings, where, O horrible thought! by ſome revolution of blind nature, eternal torments might become our ſad, our cruel portion.

The momentary experience of preſent life might perhaps afford us ſome ſmall degree of hope

hope and comfort; but what avails obſervations made in this ſhort ſpace, when applied to eternity? What avails a hope only founded on a fleeting breath? Would the fluttering inſect, whoſe duration is but for a day, dare to conſider that day as perfectly repreſenting the eternal condition of the univerſe? The mixture of pains and pleaſures which men experience in this world, can be no immediate indication of what may exiſt in futurity: For uniformity, equality and likeneſs, the only proper foundation of our conjectures on futurity, are connected with general ideas of order and harmony: But ſuch ideas are noways applicable to a nature ſubjected to the laws of blind neceſſity.

We, no doubt, find it difficult, and ſometimes impoſſible to aſcertain the deſigns of the Supreme Being; yet by a ſort of analogy, we can often, in ſome meaſure, perceive the divine will. Our ſenſes, our feelings, and all our intellectual powers come to aid us in the purſuit. But if we are the offspring of blind nature, we could have no relation with its different parts; and the ſtudy of our moral conſtitution could by no means inſtruct us in the various changes of which the material world is ſuſceptible. We could only diſcover, that there is much leſs reaſon to oppoſe imaginary limits to the blind action of unguided nature, than, in part, to circumſcribe within certain bounds, the operations of an Omnipotent

tent Being, whoſe attributes are nevertheleſs infinite: For the ideas of order and juſtice and goodneſs, which ariſe from a knowledge of the divine perfections, ſeem, as it were, to mark out a circle amidſt infinity, which the mind of man is able to trace: Yes, thoſe ſublime ideas expand and elevate our thoughts: But what would ſuch reflections avail, were we only to inveſtigate the myſteries of inert matter, and the laws of blind neceſſity?

Let me then repeat, as a termination of theſe reflections, that all would be obſcure, all would be at random, ſo to ſpeak, in the fate of man, if we could not attribute the order and diſpoſition of the world, to the will and the power of an Intelligent Being, whoſe perfections are faintly repreſented by our own intellectual faculties.

In ſhort, though in the ſyſtem of the eternal exiſtence of matter, men were aſſured that death is a certain ceſſation of their individual exiſtence, and that they could diveſt themſelves of every idea of its renewal, by any poſſible means, yet it would not follow, that we ſhould become indifferent about the torments of ſentient beings, who may exiſt through eternity. The metaphyſical notion of our identity, or what we call *myſelf*, or *ourſelves*, depending on that imperceptible and myſterious point, which unites our preſent and paſt ideas, ought not to make us regardleſs of every other deſtiny, or render us indifferent

ent to the unknown effects that may reſult from theſe revolutions of nature, with which we are unacquainted. The anxieties and troubles of thoſe beings who are to live in ſucceeding ages, do not abſolutely intereſt us as individuals; yet we cannot avoid ſenſibly feeling for them a ſort of abſtract ſympathy, not eaſily to be deſcribed.

I admit, that in the ſyſtem of chance and unguided nature, happineſs and miſery, whether temporary or eternal, have the ſame degree of probability: But what a dreadful equality! Can we, without alarm, conſider the riſk of ſuch a chance?

How, then, can the enemies of Religion pretend, that Atheiſm frees us from all fear of futurity? I do not perceive that any thing in this fatal ſyſtem can produce ſuch an effect. The belief of a God, ſuch as my heart naturally repreſents, affords me encouragement, and quiets all my feelings. I contemplate Him as good,—indulgent,—acquainted with my weakneſs,—and ready to grant me happineſs: Thus I can ſee death advance without terror, and ſometimes with joyful hope. But every fear, every apprehenſion is reaſonable, if I am ſubjected to blind nature, whoſe laws and revolutions are unknown to me. In vain do I ſeek for means to eſcape from its power: Neither darkneſs nor death afford me a retreat; nor can I find an aſylum in the

the immenſity of ſpace, nor in eternity itſelf. I look every where in vain for compaſſion and goodneſs; for in this blind eternity, there is no ſource of intelligence,—unguided nature and chance imperiouſly govern all. Vainly do I aſk this *nature*, what deſtiny awaits me,—it is deaf to my voice. Devoid of will, deſign and ſentiment, it is governed by an irreſiſtible *neceſſity*, whoſe action is the moſt incomprehenſible of all myſteries. Ah! what an origin, what a cruel parent would this *nature* be, ſo indifferent to its own offspring! How dreadful to the human mind would be the deſtruction of every primitive idea of order, of juſtice, and of goodneſs? I muſt add, that though I were convinced that the gates of futurity were for ever ſhut againſt me, I would be leſs unhappy and forlorn, were I to commit to a Father, to a Benefactor, the depoſite of a life which I hold from Him. This laſt communication with the Ruler of nature, would mitigate my ſufferings. I would behold his power, ere my eyes were for ever cloſed,—and I ſhould, at leaſt, hope, that God remained the protector of thoſe I loved; it would be ſome comfort that my deſtiny was united to his will,—that my exiſtence, and the labours I had undergone, would form one indelible point of His eternal remembrance; and that the incomprehenſible nonentity into which I was going to plunge, was ſtill a part of his Empire. But were

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a feeling and elevated ſoul, which had ſometimes experienced a ſenſe of its own grandeur, to know with certainty, that by a blind movement, it was to be diſſipated in that dreary void,—ſunk in that dark abyſs, where all that is vile or mean on earth is equally precipitated,—ſuch a thought would preclude every noble ambition, check every virtue, and be a continual ſource of ſadneſs and deſpair.

O ſave us from that dreadful thought, thou ſublime and happy idea of a God! Afford us courage and comfort, and grant us the conſolation and hope for which we ſeek. Guard our minds from thoſe fatal phantoms,—thoſe vain ſuppoſitions, and ſophiſtical reaſonings, which have been interpoſed, to render man a ſtranger to his Creator. Let us, repoſing on the firſt inſtructions of nature, take our intimate feeling for our guide,—that interior ſentiment, which is neither *thought* nor *reaſon*, but greater than both, and which perhaps forms the cloſeſt connection, the moſt certain communication, with thoſe ſublime truths, that the mind, of itſelf, can never reach.

CHAP.

CHAP. XV.

On the Reſpect that is due from true Philoſophy to Religion.

OUR ſenſes, and our reaſon, and our feelings, all concur to ſtrengthen our belief in the exiſtence of a God: And, without being able to comprehend this Infinite Being, or to form a juſt idea of His eſſence and perfections, a general, though awful ſenſe of His greatneſs, and the conſtant experience of our own weakneſs, are the predominant motives, which, in all countries, and in all ages, have impelled mankind to worſhip a God. Theſe natural ideas have acquired new force by the light of Revelation. But in a philoſophical work, ſuch as the preſent, it would be improper to enter on a diſcuſſion of the authenticity of the Chriſtian Religion; nor could we add any thing new to the doctrines contained in the multiplicity of books compoſed at different periods on this important ſubject. Every diſcuſſion, whoſe circumſtances depend on the truth of certain facts, muſt neceſſarily be circumſcribed

cumſcribed within preciſe limits; and we are obliged to fall into the common track, when we wiſh to purſue a path ſo long beaten. I will therefore confine myſelf to a few general reflections, ſuch as may be moſt ſuited to the genius of the preſent age, and to the turn which our ſentiments have acquired from the now prevailing opinions: For our opinions, like our ideas, conſtantly vary according to the changes which inſenſibly take place in the manners and cuſtom of the nation. One period is remarkable for intolerance and bigotry,—another for careleſſneſs and indifference,—another for a haughty contempt of ancient cuſtoms; every age, every generation, is diſtinguiſhed by a particular character; and this change of character, which is ſometimes imagined to be the effect of new ideas, is, for moſt part, no more than the natural conſequence of the extravagance of former opinions. Men are ſubjected to moral laws, in ſome reſpects ſimilar to thoſe of mechanics, and, amidſt all their boaſted knowledge, they often remind us of children at play, who, placing themſelves on the extremity of a long balance, ſucceſſively riſe and deſcend. None but moderate ſentiments can keep their ground for any length of time, becauſe theſe are ſupported by their own force; all others have a borrowed action, and this action can never be in perfect equilibrium with truth.

Every ſort of revelation muſt, from its nature, appear leſs evident to the mind, in proportion as the proofs of its authenticity are diſtant. And if ſome dogmas of a particular religious doctrine, contain a myſtical ſenſe,—if the modes of worſhip adopted by the governors of Church and State, ſhould ſometimes appear not altogether conſonant with the majeſtic idea we muſt form of the Great Ruler of the univerſe, we cannot think it extraordinary, that the various parts of theſe religious inſtitutions, ſhould give riſe to controverſies and diviſions in opinion; neither ſhould we be exaſperated at thoſe who, after a candid examination, ſtill retain ſome doubts. Since God has thought proper only to manifeſt Himſelf to us, in proportion to our degree of underſtanding, the exerciſe of our intellectual faculties can ſurely never be diſpleaſing to him: But enlightened reaſon, and what deſerves the appellation of true philoſophy, does by no means favour the ſmalleſt contempt for religious worſhip in general, or for thoſe reſpectable ſentiments, of which Chriſtianity is the ſupport. Every doctrine which leads to the adoration of the God of the univerſe, merits the reſpect of His creatures. Such perſons, therefore, as are moſt diſpoſed to conteſt the authenticity of the Scriptures, ſhould ſtill have ſome regard to thoſe precepts, which ſeem calculated to aid the human mind in the

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laſt efforts it can make towards the knowledge of a God,—like the friendly bark preſented to the periſhing wretch, who, amid the boundleſs ocean, vainly endeavours to force his way by his own feeble arm.

Every one muſt perceive, that the ſentiments of reſpect and gratitude towards a God, which are impreſſed on the moſt enlightened mind, are in perfect correſpondence with the evangelical doctrines contained in the New Teſtament: And at thoſe moments, when our deſire of happineſs is checked by that natural timidity which ariſes from contraſting infinite greatneſs with our own inſignificance,—infinite power with our own weakneſs,—the view of the divine perfections afforded by the Goſpel, encourages our hopes, and diſpels our fears. Rational Religion teaches us to look above this world for protection againſt all the miſeries of our condition, by pointing out to us Sovereign Mercy and Infinite Goodneſs. The Chriſtian doctrines conduct us to the ſame end: So that, Religion and true philoſophy are at one in their higheſt, their ultimate period.

Thus, the profeſſor of Religion and the Deiſt, unite in adoring the ſame exalted object; and alſo agree, when they turn their attention to civil ſociety and the moral duties. For every wiſe man muſt pay homage to the morality of the Goſpel: Since no philoſophy could deviſe a ſyſtem of morals more rational, or better ſuited

to the ſituation of mankind *. Since we thus ſee opinions apparently the moſt oppoſite, meet, as it were, in their extremities,—ſince we ſee, that the worſhip of God, and reſpect for morality, united, form the tenor of the Evangelical doctrines, Why ſhould the rational philoſopher be offended, becauſe Chriſtians place their faith intermediately between theſe grand ideas? If he thinks he can, of himſelf, ſurpaſs the barrier placed betwixt man and his Creator, Why ſhould he, on that account, inveterately reprobate the ſentiments of thoſe who are attached to the comfortable ſyſtem of interceſſion and redemption?

In ſhort, were we even not to agree with many of the doctrines taught by the interpreters of Chriſtianity, that would be no ſufficient motive for breaking that alliance which Religion maintains amongſt mankind, and which is ſupported, in every nation, by the mode of public worſhip made choice of by Government. What a mean idea would we have of the genius and abilities of that philoſopher, who, on obſerving particular ceremonies, myſteries, or modes of worſhip, which appear to him exceptionable, could not riſe ſuperior to his diſguſt, and conſider them to be, as it were, the atmoſphere of religious opinions,—and who, even independent of theſe opinions, does not preſerve a ſacred regard for

* I will offer ſome reflections on this ſubject in another chapter.

for the whole dependencies of the moſt ſublime and moſt ſalutary of all thoughts? It is eaſy, however, to perceive, that, to the greater part of men, moral duties, religious principles, and all the exterior homage rendered to the Deity, compoſe a whole ſo ſtrictly connected, that we are in danger of ſhaking the foundation of the edifice, when we attack the exterior parts. The imagination of the vulgar cannot be treated in the ſame manner as that of the contemplative genius; and it is a great miſtake to think, that popular opinions may be influenced by the ſame arguments we would employ to convince a man of profound thought. There is a certain ſyſtem of proportion, ſuited to the various faculties of intelligent beings, in the ſame manner, as there are certain degrees of proportion applicable to phyſical objects.

Nothing, then, can be more fooliſh, than the inconſiderate cenſure of ſuch religious ceremonies as are allowed and reſpected in the country where one lives. Some people fancy that there is no harm in ſpeaking diſreſpectfully of public worſhip; but, were they to obſerve attentively the temper and habits of thoſe to whom they addreſs ſuch diſcourſe, they muſt immediately perceive, how eaſily they might injure thoſe ſentiments which are the ſource of their tranquillity, and the ſafeguard of their moral conduct. The deliverer of Switzerland ſtruck off, with his

arrow, an apple placed on the head of his only ſon: But who can expect to equal his dexterity and his good fortune.

Let it not be attempted to controvert the truth of theſe obſervations, by alleging, that ſeveral eminent men have made very rapid innovations on the forms and ceremonies of the Roman Church, without weakening the religious ſpirit of the nations, in which theſe reforms have been adopted. The cauſes, the circumſtances and the conſequences of thoſe revolutions, which make ſo great a figure in hiſtory, are in no ſhape connected with the preſent queſtion. The reformers of the ſixteenth century, whilſt they preached their new doctrines, made open profeſſion of religious zeal and fervent piety. Thus, although they diſapproved of ſome parts of the eſtabliſhed worſhip, yet, they recommended a rigid adherence to the fundamental principles of Chriſtianity, and even endeavoured to introduce a ſeverity of morals, which prohibited many pleaſures that were not formerly forbidden; and, indeed, had not the new doctrines implied a profound reſpect for the fundamental principles of Chriſtianity, they never could have attracted ſo many followers.

There is then no ſort of compariſon between the cenſures of the reformers, and the ironical and contemptuous diſcourſe of thoſe men who at preſent inſult our moſt ſacred opinions.

Such

Such perſons now, alas! too numerous, are ſometimes prompted by mere licentiouſneſs, ſometimes by vanity, and the enthuſiaſm of a falſe philoſophy, and ſometimes by pride, and the vain-glorious oſtentation of conducting themſelves by principles entirely their own. There is indeed a great difference between the ſerious and ſteady procedure of the reformers, and the verſatility of the buſy opponents of Religion. The latter do not ſtop to clear up ſome point of doctrine, or to diſpute the interpretation of ſome precept,—they aim at Religion itſelf; and if they begin with attacking the outworks, it is with a view to undermine the whole ſtructure. They artfully avail themſelves of every advantage, by watching opportunities, when they may ſeaſonably employ a tone of ironical pleaſantry; and this is the more dangerous, as it gives a turn of gaiety, and an air of confidence to their diſcourſe, by which they acquire a ſort of aſcendency, and endeavour to ſhun the poſſibility of entering on an equal combat. By this means, ſome people are ſo weak as to be perſuaded, that it is through contempt, that the enemies of Religion thus paſs ſlightly over the ſubject, and on that ſuppoſition, ſubmit, in a ſervile manner, to their affected ſuperiority; ſo that what is, in fact, merely feebleneſs and ignorance on their part, beſtows conſequence on them, in the eyes of their inconſiderate admirers.

Mankind, in order to expreſs their gratitude to the Sovereign Ruler of the univerſe, and to elevate their thoughts to Him, will naturally have recourſe to every thing grand and majeſtic, which imagination can ſuggeſt. Therefore, when we diveſt thoſe tokens of reverence, of the idea they are meant to repreſent and preſerve, we can only ſee in them a vain ſhew of ſolemnity, a mere chimerical pomp. Such a contraſt may readily afford a ſubject of ridicule; but thoſe who treat the matter in this way, far from diſplaying any ingenuity, only make a mean attempt to inſult the common opinions of the greater part of mankind, who habitually reſpect every ſyſtem of devout worſhip offered to the Supreme Being.

A ſort of bold and frivolous diſcourſe againſt Religion in general, has been, of late, ſo prevalent, and has made ſuch a gradual, though ſtrong impreſſion, that, at preſent, even ſuch perſons as reſpect religious ſentiments in a juſt and liberal manner, and free of all vain parade, are obliged to conceal their opinions in public, leſt they ſhould be expoſed to a ſort of contemptuous pity, or be ſuſpected of hypocriſy. We are at liberty to converſe on every ſubject, except the greateſt and moſt intereſting which can occupy the human mind. What ſtrange authority has that imperious legiſlation obtained amongſt us, which goes by the name of *good breeding* and *faſhion!*

What

What a miſerable conſpiracy is that of weakneſs againſt Omnipotence! Men are proud of knowing at what hour the king wakes, goes to the chace, or returns,—they are eager to be informed of all the mean intrigues which elevate or degrade his courtiers; in ſhort, they paſs their whole lives in panting after the objects of vanity and the badges of ſlavery: Theſe are the conſtant topics of their converſation; while they reprobate, under the appellation of a vulgar taſte, the ſmalleſt or moſt remote expreſſion, which might recal the ideas of the admirable and harmonious univerſe, or of its Supreme Author, who has beſtowed on us ſo many bleſſings. Thus we overlook what is by far moſt excellent in our interior nature,—in that *ſelf* of which we are ſo fond, in order to fix our attention ſolely on thoſe objects of vanity, with which we are ſo fooliſhly puffed up. How ungrateful, then, is this conduct, ſince we ſee that our intelligence, our will, and our ſenſes, proceed not from ourſelves, and that our exiſtence and all our faculties are the ſeal of an unknown power! We thus, as it were, bear the badge of our Maſter and Benefactor, and yet ſhall we be reſtrained from pronouncing his name? To you ſubtile ſophiſters, we muſt impute this falſe ſhame,—to you who have firſt audaciouſly branded with unjuſt contempt the moſt eſtimable ſentiments,—to you who, by employing in the diſpute, the nimble and piercing

ſhafts of ridicule, have given confidence to the weakeſt and moſt frivolous of men, of whom a numerous tribe, of every rank and age, have become your diſciples. Thus, we often remark among thoſe who affect to treat religious principles with ſupercilious deriſion, a multitude of inexperienced and giddy youth, who are, perhaps, incapable of ſupporting the moſt trivial argument, or even of connecting two or three abſtract propoſitions. The oppoſers of Religion have thus, with a perfidious art, taken advantage of the firſt dawn of *pride* and *ſelf-love*, to perſuade thoſe novices, that they can determine, at a glance, thoſe profound queſtions which men of the higheſt ability have never been able to reſolve. Indeed, ſuch is the audacious language and deciſive tone of the opponents of Religion, in the preſent age, that while we hear them murmur ſo loudly againſt the diſpoſitions of Providence, we are only ſurpriſed to ſee how much they differ in ſtature from thoſe rebellious giants, in the fable, who ventured to brave Heaven, and ſcale Olympus.

I believe, however, that if contempt for religious ſentiments did not form a ſtriking contraſt with the common opinions, thoſe who profeſs to feel ſuch contempt, would quickly change their ſentiments. They very often only conſider, in a ſuperficial manner, the pernicious tendency of their maxims, whilſt they believe themſelves ſtill

in

in the oppoſition; but were they ever to obtain a majority on their ſide, being then no longer ſtimulated by the pride of ſingularity, they would probably very ſoon diſcover the abſurdity of their principles, and conſequently relinquiſh them.

There are, no doubt, a great number of worthy and truly virtuous perſons, who, though they highly value the truths and precepts of Religion, are nevertheleſs the prey of doubt and uncertainty, and thus become the conſtant victims of their own unſettled minds. But men of this deſcription do not aim at dominion: On the contrary, they rather wiſh to be confirmed by the example of thoſe whoſe confidence is more aſſured. They ſincerely venerate thoſe happy ſentiments which, unfortunately, they feel themſelves unable to adopt with a ſufficient degree of confidence. They would endeavour to ſupport their feeble hopes, by that aſſurance which Chriſtianity inſpires;—Yes, they even reſpect the enthuſiaſm of piety; becauſe it is far better to yield to the emotions of a lively imagination, than to oppoſe, with cold indifference, ſuch opinions as are calculated to diffuſe general happineſs. Then, if among ſuch perſons, there were ſome, to whom nature had granted ſuperior wit or eloquence, they would ſtudiouſly avoid exerting theſe talents to diſturb the repoſe of thoſe peaceable ſouls, who yield, with

with implicit confidence, to all the gentle emotions which Religion inſpires. A man of good ſenſe would never allow himſelf to ſpread ſadneſs and deſpondency all around, in order to ſhow that he contemns ſome vulgar prejudices; or that he may make ſome ingenious diſtinctions concerning particular parts of the eſtabliſhed forms of Religion. This would be as abſurd as to ſtop the progreſs of an army, when advancing towards the enemy, in order to diſcriminate, with ſcientific accuracy, the different tones of the warlike inſtruments of muſic. Upon a ſimilar principle, the frivolous, though bold diſcourſes of ſome philoſophers, are, in my opinion, often moſt grovelling, when they aſpire at great things, and boaſt of the extent and loftineſs of their views.

I will not addreſs myſelf to thoſe who deny even the exiſtence of a God. Alas! if they will be ſo unhappy as to ſhut their eyes againſt this reſplendent light,—if their ſouls be ſo devoid of ſenſibility, as not to be affected by the comfortable truths which depend on this grand thought,—if they will ſtill be deaf to the powerful voice of nature,—if they will truſt more to feeble reaſoning, than to their internal feelings, at leaſt, let them not ſpread their baleful doctrine, which, like the head of Meduſa, would transform all who approached it into ſtone: Let them remove from our ſight that hideous monſter,

ſter, or let his hoarſe hiſſing be only heard in the dreary ſolitude of their own heart: Let them compaſſionate the diſtreſs, the deſpair, into which the whole human race would be plunged, were that mild and vivid light, to which we look up, as our guide and conſolation, ever obſcured: In ſhort, if they can really perſuade themſelves that morality can be reconciled with atheiſm, let them give the firſt proof of it, by remaining ſilent. If they cannot, however, abſtain from publiſhing their deplorable opinions, at leaſt, let ſome remnant of generoſity induce them to inform us of their dangerous tendency, by placing in the front of their works this terrible inſcription of Dante's: *Laſciat' ogni ſperanza voi ch'entrate* *.

* The inſcription over the entrance of Hell, "Abandon "every hope, ye who enter in."

CHAP.

CHAP. XVI.

The ſame Subject continued.—Reflections on Intolerance.

THE ſurface of the earth contains nearly the two hundred and fortieth part of the ſuperficies of the different opaque bodies, which revolve round the luminary placed at the centre of our ſyſtem.

The fixed ſtars are, in all probability, ſuns, which, like ours, enlighten and fertilize planets ſimilar to the world we inhabit.

An eminent Aſtronomer *, has of late diſcovered fifty thouſand of ſuch ſtars, in a zone of fifteen degrees in length, and two in breadth,—a ſpace which correſponds to the thirteen hundred and ſeventy-fourth part of the celeſtial ſphere.

Now, were we to ſuppoſe as many to be contained in every equal ſection of the firmament, the number we might diſcover, would amount to nearly ſixty-nine millions.

Were

† Dr Herschel.

Were then, each of theſe ſtars the centre of a planetary ſyſtem ſimilar to this of ours, we ſhould form an idea of a number of habitable worlds, whoſe extent would be ſixteen or ſeventeen thouſand millions of times greater than the ſurface of the earth *.

However much the ingenious invention which aſſiſts us in exploring the etherial regions, may be ſuſceptible of improvement, yet, even at the period when it ſhould arrive at its greateſt perfection, the ſpace that could fall within the reach of our aſtronomical knowledge, would only be an undiſtinguiſhable point, compared with the immenſe extent which our imagination can repreſent.

In ſhort, our imagination itſelf, as well as all our mental faculties, may perhaps be conſidered as only a ſmall degree of infinite intellectual power, and the moſt extenſive views which it can

* It may be ſaid, that the fifty thouſand fixed ſtars perceived by Dr Herſchel, being the reſult of obſervations directed to the *via lactea*, or milky way, we cannot expect to diſcover an equal number in other parts of the heavens, of a like extent; but independent of thoſe ſtars which Dr Herſchel diſtinguiſhed, he reckoned there were twice as many more, of which he had only an inſtantaneous glance. See the Philoſophical Tranſactions of the Royal Society 1784. Dr Herſchel has probably, ſince that time, made new diſcoveries, which have not yet reached me. I find in his paper read to that illuſtrious Society, that he conſiders the new teleſcope as being ſtill *in its infancy*; theſe are his own words.

can ſuggeſt, merely as a ſlight ſketch of univerſal exiſtence.

What an inſignificant atom, then, does our earth appear, when compared with that immenſity which the human mind vainly ſtrives to graſp? How diminutive does it ſeem, when compared even with thoſe numerous terreſtrial bodies, whoſe exiſtence ſcience has either actually diſcovered, or rendered probable by rational conjectures?

Can we then believe, that the inhabitants of this minute particle of duſt, and indeed only a very few of them, have a right to aſſert, that they alone are acquainted with the true mode of worſhipping the Creator of the univerſe? Their dwelling is an imperceptible point, amid the immenſity of ſpace,—their life a fleeting moment amid eternity,—they paſs away like the rapid glance of lightning, amid the courſe of time, where ages of ages diſappear: How then dare they announce to the preſent and all ſucceeding inhabitants of the earth, that none can eſcape the vengeance of Heaven, who ſhall alter one tittle of their ritual? How contracted muſt their notions be of the relations eſtabliſhed between the God of the univerſe, and thoſe tranſitory beings, thoſe atoms, diſperſed through the vaſt extent of nature? Let them endeavour to lift up one extremity of the veil that covers ſo many myſteries,—let them look up and view, for a moment,

moment, thoſe ſtupendous ſpheres which r ll on in their courſe,—let them contemplate the infinity of wonders that appear in the vaulted firmament, amid that aw ul immenſity which overpowers our imagination ;—and, at that moment, let them judge if they ſhould expect, by exterior forms, or the pomp of their ceremonies, to render their adoration and homage acceptable to the Omnipotent. Shall we then imagine, that we can, by the pride of our opinions, merit the regard of the Supreme Being ? Is it not more reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that all the inhabitants of the earth have acceſs to His throne ; and that the Sovereign Ruler of the world has permitted all mankind to elevate their thoughts to Him, and to approach Him, by having ſuch ſentiments of humble admiration and gratitude deeply impreſſed on their hearts, as form the moſt natural and moſt intimate connection between man and his Creator ?

It is, no doubt, neceſſary that there ſhould be ſome eſtabliſhed form of public worſhip, and that there ſhould be certain diſtinct ſymbols, certain ſolemn expreſſions of veneration, of which the eſſential characters ought never to vary, in order to fix and ſtrengthen the opinions of the common people, whoſe minds are ſo eaſily affected by external ceremonies. Weak minds muſt eaſily find their way ; there muſt be no doubts nor uncertainties oppoſed to their courſe.

In ſhort, it were to be wiſhed, that the inhabitants of every country, who live under the ſame government and laws, ſhould, at the ſame time, be united, by adopting the ſame mode of public worſhip: Thus the ſacred tie of Religion would embrace the whole people in an equal manner, and the principles in which they are educated, would be ſupported and fortified by the force of example. But as moral rectitude muſt be the primary law of a Prince, its clear and diſtinct precepts ought, on all occaſions, to be followed, without regard to any political conſiderations, however ſpecious. It is by no means juſtifiable in a prince, to preſs on to any purpoſe, how wiſe ſoever it may ſeem, where he cannot proceed without employing injuſtice and oppreſſion; and this rule appears equally applicable to mens *principles* as to their *properties*. It would be eaſy to conceive a plan for diſtributing riches and fortune in ſuch a manner as to contribute, more than any other, to increaſe the public treaſure, and ſtrengthen the hand of Government: But though the knowledge of ſuch a ſyſtem, may, in a general manner, influence the conduct of thoſe who have the direction of public affairs; yet it can never give them a right capriciouſly to ſeize the property of individuals, or to aſſign every one a rank in ſociety according to their fancy. The ſame principles are applicable, in a ſtill more forcible manner, to *opinions*. In order to direct

direct the courſe of opinions, we ought to employ ſlow, gentle and cautious meaſures; and a ſyſtem of uniformity in the Religion of a nation, though of itſelf very deſirable, would ceaſe to be an advantage, were it neceſſary for its eſtabliſhment to have recourſe to violence, or even the leaſt degree of conſtraint. A man's *opinion* muſt ever remain in his own poſſeſſion; and *conſcience* is a property which, above all, muſt be held ſacred.

Many people talk of the union of civil tolerance with religious intolerance. By the one Proteſtants are protected in Catholic countries, and Catholics in Proteſtant countries; and by the other, every mode of worſhip is forbidden, except that which is eſtabliſhed by law. But were the number of diſſenters to become conſiderable, a great part of the nation would be deprived of public worſhip; and Government ought not to appear indifferent to this circumſtance, ſince it is of importance, that it ſhould carefully maintain every inſtitution which tends to the ſupport of morality.

Nothing can poſſibly be ſaid in favour of intolerance, when conſidered in its exceſs. We all know what opinion we ought to form of thoſe cruelties and perſecutions, of which hiſtory has tranſmitted an account, and of the conduct of thoſe who gloried in ſuch enormities. We cannot reſtrain our indignation, when we view the

faggots which are ſtill kindled around thoſe wretches, ſcattered over the face of the earth, of whom JESUS CHRIST himſelf, amidſt his agonies, ſaid, with ſuch condeſcending goodneſs, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* It is indeed time to aboliſh for ever thoſe horrible cuſtoms, thoſe ignominious traces of our ancient frenzy. O God! dare they ſo torment Thy creatures in Thy name! Would they pretend to ſacrifice the work of Thy hand to Thy glory? Would they raviſh from feeble helpleſs beings, that portion of happineſs which Thou haſt beſtowed on them, with paternal care? Ferocious tyrants, ſavage inquiſitors, can you hope to obtain the favour of Heaven, by mutilating the members, and tearing the boſoms of thoſe unhappy mortals, who rather merit your pity, were you capable of feeling that gentle emotion? The God of Mercy and Goodneſs rejects ſuch offerings,—and theſe human ſacrifices are an abomination in His ſight. Why ſhall not men, who are themſelves ever ſubject to miſtake, forgive the errors of others? Alas! if infallibility of reaſon and judgment were our only title to Divine Benevolence, every one of us might caſt down his eyes, devoid of all hope.

Thoſe who arrogantly boaſt, that they are acquainted with the only mode of worſhip agreeable to the Supreme Being, immediately loſe their claim to our confidence, when, by ſhewing

ing a ſpirit of intolerance, they deviate ſo evidently from the character with which they ought to be impreſſed by the idea of a God, who is the Protector of human weakneſs. But the abſurdity of pretending to inſpire faith by acts of rigour and ſeverity, has been ſo often and ſo clearly demonſtrated, that I need not dwell upon a queſtion which common ſenſe may at once determine. I will, however, make one obſervation, which, I hope, may be ſufficient to intimidate the conſciences of inquiſitors, and all who adopt their deteſtable maxims: Since the operation of the mind can only be influenced by reaſoning, every attempt to accompliſh this purpoſe by violence, may be conſidered as an attack made on the doctrine of the ſpirituality of the ſoul,—an indirect aſſociation with materialiſts: For we muſt admit the identity of *matter* and *thought*, before we can believe, that compulſion and rigorous treatment can influence mens opinions. We muſt regard man as a paſſive being, governed by mechanical laws, before it is poſſible to ſuppoſe, that, with the apparatus of torture, a *ſenſation* can be excited which, by ſome incomprehenſible means, may produce the ſame effect as *judgment* and *perſuaſion*.

Becauſe the indignant emotions of the heart are more powerful than the cool arguments of offended reaſon, we feel a ſtrong reſentment againſt intolerance; independent of this, ſuch ty-

ranny would only merit our contempt, as indicating a ſingular meanneſs of ſoul. Who can remember without pity, thoſe unhappy diſſenſions ſo long maintained amongſt mankind, in which ſo many weak and blind zealots inconſiderately devoted themſelves to ſupport the vanity and unintelligible tenets of ſome ſelf-important dogmatiſt? The folly of ſuch diſputes inſtantly appears on cool examination; and we need only to conſider them in an abſtract manner, in order at once to diſcover their abſurdity and inſignificance.

It is only by diffuſing knowledge and wholeſome inſtruction, that we can hope to ſuppreſs enthuſiaſm and intolerance; and we ought to beware of the dangerous ſervices which a ſpirit of indifference ſeems to offer: It would only be exchanging one evil for another equally fatal, were we to endeavour to free men of fanaticiſm, by deſtroying the fundamental principles of religion. No worthy ſentiments, no ſalutary opinions, could ſubſiſt, were the various errors which have crept around them, to be torn away with a raſh and violent hand; and were the evil we find ſo conſtantly blended with every ſpecies of moral order, to be the occaſion of condemning the whole ſyſtem indiſcriminately.

Let us then, with pleaſure, acknowledge the advantages which have accrued from the labours of thoſe eminent writers, who have defended the

cauſe of toleration with energy and zeal; for ſuch works may be juſtly eſteemed amongſt the moſt eſſential benefits we have derived from the union of ſcience and genius. It muſt, however, be remarked, that ſome of thoſe writers have forfeited, in a great meaſure, their claim to merit, by endeavouring to degrade Religion in general, in order to attain their purpoſe. Such a conduct was unworthy of men of enlightened minds and ſuperior genius, who, more than others, ought to aſſign limits to reaſon, and never deſpair of its influence. What ſhould we think, if, even among thoſe who ſo ſucceſsfully attack the tyranny exerciſed over conſcience, ſome ſhould be found intolerant in defence of their own ſyſtems? What if we could accuſe them of deſpiſing, and even hating thoſe who do not concur with them; and if, by an ill-founded imputation of puſillanimity or hypocriſy, they endeavour to calumniate thoſe who do not adopt their ſentiments? How inconſiſtent, too, does their conduct appear, when they ſometimes forget their profeſſed incredulity, and raiſe a loud clamour about the miſeries to which mankind are ſubjected, and the pretended diſorders of the univerſe, in order to diſprove the exiſtence of a God, and of His Providence! One would think, that having overthrown the empire of the Deity, that they might remain the ſole legiſlators of the world, they, at length, ſeemed to regret the want of a

rival, and wiſhed to rebuild the temple they themſelves had demoliſhed, there to erect a vain idol, which they might inſult. In ſhort, how abſurd is their rancour againſt thoſe who reject their doctrines, ſince, according to their profeſſed ſyſtem of *fatality*, reaſon loſes its ſway, and the maſter as well as the diſciple, is equally ſubjected to the laws of blind neceſſity?

To gain an aſcendency over the mind by the power of eloquence, is indeed a great advantage; for ſuch an authority is not confined to any time or place; but to acquire a right to ſuch an extenſive reign, we muſt renounce faſhionable opinions,—the counſels of vanity, and the inſtigations of ſelf-love, and be only actuated by that great and univerſal concern, the happineſs of the whole human race.

I would not, however, wiſh to prohibit the candid philoſopher, or the man of genius, from treating of any ſubject that may occur. For there are abuſes and prejudices every where, which can only be removed, by ſuch a train of reaſoning as may enable us to approach toward the truth. But as there is a philoſophy for our *thoughts*, there is likewiſe one for our *actions*. Thus, I would wiſh, that men of ſuperior genius, who perceive more clearly than others the moral order of things, would treat with caution and circumſpection what relates to ſuch opinions as are moſt eſſential to our happineſs;—that a degree

gree of reſpect ſhould be always ſhown to theſe opinions, while they cenſure fanaticiſm and ſuperſtition, and that prudence ſhould reſtra n them from reprobating with too much aſperity, certain ancient and eſtabliſhed principles, in order to ſubſtitute their new doctrines.

Such a wiſh is far from being fulfilled. We cannot help lamenting the deſign of the greater part of thoſe authors who have, of late, written on religious ſubjects. Some have endeavoured artfully to deſtroy, or at leaſt relax, the ſalutary band which unites man to the idea of the Supreme Being; others lurk in ſome myſtic notion, as in a dark den, indiſcriminately denouncing anathemas againſt every kind of doubt and uncertainty, and confounding, in their rigorous cenſures, the acceſſary ideas with the principal opinions.

However, though they take a courſe ſo oppoſite, they both unfortunately concur, in placing the eſſential principles of Religion on the ſame footing with its mere ſymbols and external ceremonies: But they are influenced by very different motives. Some act with a view of making religious zeal ſerve to defend every particular of the worſhip of which they are the miniſters; others, actuated by motives of ſelf-love, readily admit this confuſion of religious principles with mere exterior forms, in order that they may undermine Religion itſelf, while they only

attack

attack its out-works. Theſe combatants are, however, equally miſtaken in the ground they have choſen.

It is now more than ever, become neceſſary, to recommend Religion with wiſdom and moderation, and by that gentle language, where reaſon and ſenſibility are happily united, which is ſo congenial with the mild ſpirit of evangelical morality. It is by ſuch means alone, that we can expect, at preſent, to maintain the influence of the moſt ſalutary principles. Men are eaſily hurried beyond the mark, while their minds are unable to perceive any preciſe limits; but the daily and rapid progreſs of knowledge obliges us, at this time, to uſe more circumſpection. The imagination muſt be reſtrained, and muſt give way to reaſon. But though it may be very proper and neceſſary to animate reaſon, yet now it would be in vain, ſhould any one attempt to diſguiſe it. Falſe notions alone need the aid of exaggeration; we may ſay, that theſe naturally tend to extremes, in order to eſcape the inveſtigation of reaſon and good ſenſe, by means of which their abſurdity would be inſtantly detected.

I will conclude with obſerving, That both thoſe who endeavour to relax all the ties of Religion, with a view to free us from ſuperſtition, and thoſe who, to ſtrengthen them, have recourſe to intolerance, equally miſs their aim. The hatred ſo naturally excited by every kind of violence

lence and conſtraint in matters of opinion, creates an averſion to Religion, in the minds of thoſe perſons who are inſenſibly led to conſider this excellent ſyſtem as the motive or pretext for a blind ſpirit of perſecution. And attacks directed againſt religious opinions in general, engage well diſpoſed minds, to adhere more ſtrenuouſly to thoſe cuſtoms and forms, which appear to them the moſt proper mode of adoring the Supreme Being,—in the ſame manner, as we never fail to redouble our zeal for a friend, when we are amongſt people who ſeem diſpoſed to abuſe him.

Let us now, for it is ſurely full time, unite with one accord, in rendering to the Supreme Being ſincere worſhip, ſuitable to the dignity of the Creator and Preſerver of the univerſe. Let us now for ever baniſh ſeverity and ſuperſtition; but let us beware of that fatal indifference, which is the preſage and the cauſe of ſo many evils: And when we have eſtabliſhed the empire of ſound reaſon, let us adhere with firmneſs to thoſe ſalutary opinions that are thus happily freed from errors; and let us reſiſt, to the utmoſt of our power, the treacherous attempts of thoſe who would deprive us of our hopes, on pretence of guarding us againſt the deviations of imagination. Yes, a Religion, diſengaged from the paſſions of men, in its native purity and beauty, ought ever to dwell amongſt us. Public order, private happineſs, equally demand it: All our reflections

reflections ought to lead us to elevate our ſouls towards that Omnipotent Being, whoſe exiſtence all nature declares aloud. Religion, well underſtood, far from being the origin of rigour or violence, is the foundation of every ſocial virtue,—of every mild and indulgent ſentiment. In this light we ought to view it, and follow its dictates. We have no right to tyrannize over the opinions of others, or to give deſpotic laws to the mind; and we ought carefully to remark, that even a moderate and rational Religion itſelf, can only guide us in the path of virtue and happineſs, by equally addreſſing, with patient and unremitting aſſiduity, both our reaſon and our feelings.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVII.

Reflections on the Morality of the Chriſtian Religion.

THE courſe of my ſubject naturally leads me to make a few reflections on a matter which has been often treated: But, in order to avoid, as much as poſſible, the common track, I ſhall confine myſelf to the conſideration of thoſe particulars of evangelical morality, which ſeem, in a peculiar manner, to diſtinguiſh its ſublime doctrines.

The moſt evident characteriſtic of Chriſtian morality, is that ſpirit of charity and forbearance, which breathes throughout all its precepts. The ancients, no doubt, honoured the beneficent virtues; but that precept which recommends the *poor* and the *weak* to the protection of the *opulent* and *powerful*, belongs eſſentially to our Religion. With what anxiety, and benevolence, does the great legiſlator of Chriſtianity, return continually to the ſame ſentiment, the ſame concern! The tender emotions of pity, always lend

lend a pleaſing and irreſiſtible force to his perſuaſive eloquence: But, above all, I admire the important leſſon he gives, when pointing out the cloſe connection between the duties we owe to the Supreme Being, and thoſe we owe to men. Having termed the love of God, *the firſt commandment of the law*, the Evangeliſt adds, *and the ſecond, which is like unto it, is to love thy neighbour as thyſelf*,—The ſecond, which is like unto it! How ſimple, yet how comprehenſive is this expreſſion? Can any thought be more intereſting, more ſublime, than the idea of God himſelf being ready to diſcharge the obligations of the unfortunate? Where can we find any principle of morality, whoſe influence may equal this exalted ſentiment? The poor, the miſerable, however abject their ſtate, ſeem, as it were, ſurrounded with rays of glory, when our love of humanity can be viewed as an expreſſion of our love of God; and the mind is no longer loſt in contemplating the infinity and incomprehenſible attributes of the Creator of the univerſe, when we hope to maintain an habitual intercourſe with Him, by ſervices rendered to our fellow creatures. Thus, one great thought diffuſes a new and brilliant luſtre over our duties, and beſtows on the moſt metaphyſical ideas, a ſubſtance accommodated to our feeble organs.

Juſtice, reſpect for the laws, and the duties we owe to ourſelves, may be conſidered as proceeding,

ing, in ſome meaſure, from human wiſdom: *Goodneſs* alone, of all the virtues, poſſeſſes a different character. There is, in its ineffable eſſence, ſomewhat that irreſiſtibly impoſes reſpect; and it ſeems to bear an immediate relation to that firſt intention, which we muſt aſcribe to the Creator, when we aſpire to trace His motive in forming the univerſe. Goodneſs then, is the original virtue, or, ſo to ſpeak, the primitive beauty, that has preceded the creation and time itſelf. Thus, the warm exhortations to benevolence and charity contained in the Goſpel deſerve our moſt ſerious attention, and ſhould elevate our thoughts, by reminding us, that through their means we become united to a ſentiment more ancient than the world, and to which we owe our exiſtence, and our enjoyments, and our hopes *.

If from theſe elevated contemplations, we deſcend to the conſideration of ſuch political principles as are moſt extenſive, we will there remark the influence of a fact, which I formerly had occaſion to conſider, but which I will now treat under a different point of view. The unequal

* Methinks I perceive the traces of thoſe philoſophical ideas, in the reproof which Chriſt gave to one of his diſciples, who called him *Good Maſter*. 'Why calleſt thou me '*good*?' ſays he, 'there is none *good* but GOD.'

equal diviſion of property has introduced, amongſt mankind, an authority reſembling, in a great meaſure, that of maſters over their ſlaves: It may be even ſaid, with truth, that the empire of the rich is ſtill more independent; for they are not bound conſtantly to protect thoſe from whom they require ſervices. The taſte and caprice of thoſe happy favourites of fortune, fix the terms of their convention with men whoſe only patrimony is their time and ſtrength; and as ſoon as this convention is interrupted, the poor man, abſolutely ſeparated from his rich maſter, is again left expoſed to all the accidents and hardſhips incident to his ſituation. He is obliged inſtantly to offer his labours to other diſpenſers of ſubſiſtence and, may thus experience, ſeveral times in a year, all the diſtreſſes and anxieties which neceſſarily ariſe from the uncertainty of his reſources. No doubt, the ſupport of the laws has been given to this conſtitution, on the plauſible ſuppoſition, that amid the multiplicity of ſocial relations, a certain balance or equality would take place, between the *neceſſities* of the poor, which oblige them to ſolicit wages, and the *wants* of the rich, which engage them to accept their ſervices. But that equilibrium cannot poſſibly be eſtabliſhed in a preciſe and uniform manner, ſince it is the reſult of a multitude of uncertain combinations, and accidental occurrences, that are ſubjected to no poſitive direction.

rection. However, ſince it has been found neceſſary, in order to ſecure the diſtinction of poſſeſſions, to leave the fate of the greater number of men to a ſort of chance, it becomes indiſpenſably requiſite to diſcover ſome ſalutary principle, capable of tempering the abuſes that might ariſe from the unreſtrained exerciſe of the rights of property. That happy and conſolatory principle can only be found, in an obligation of *benevolence* impoſed on thoſe who have arbitrary rule, and in a univerſal ſpirit of *charity* recommended to mankind in general. Such ſentiments, and the duties which flow from them, are the only reſource of the unfortunate, and can alone mitigate the hardſhips of this ſyſtem, in which the lot of the greater part of a nation, depends on the caſual agreement of the *conveniencies* of the rich, with the *neceſſities* of the poor. Yes, without the aid and intervention of this moſt eſtimable of all virtues, the moſt numerous claſs of mankind would have juſt reaſon to regret the ſocial inſtitutions, which, at the expence of their liberty, have intruſted the opulent with the care of their ſubſiſtence. Thus, *charity*, ſo amiable in every reſpect, becomes, at once, the *moral* and *political* principle, which ſerves to conciliate *perſonal liberty* with the imperious laws of *civil right*.

I know not if ever the moral precepts of Chriſtianity have been conſidered under this

point of view: But the train of theſe reflections leads us to perceive the high importance of thoſe ſalutary doctrines, which place in the firſt rank of our duties, a ſpirit of benevolence and charity, and which afford to thoſe eſſential virtues, all the force and ſtability that religious ſentiments can impart. Thus, while the doctrines of Chriſtianity exalt our minds, its ſublime morality joins, as it were, hand in hand with our laws and inſtitutions, in order to ſuſtain thoſe that are truly conformable to reaſon, and to remedy the inconveniencies which neceſſarily reſult from the imperfection of human wiſdom.

Chriſtian charity is by no means limited to mere pecuniary ſacrifices: Its precepts extend to thoſe generous acts of ſelf-denial, to which only Religion can render human nature adequate. By its influence, ſome perſons are led to deſcend, with a firm ſtep, into thoſe dreary abodes, where the culprit is a prey to remorſe and deſpair;—and, when all his kindred and his friends have forſaken him, he beholds a comforter, who, impelled by religious ſentiments alone, comes to commiſerate his unhappy ſtate, and ſhed a ray of peace and conſolation on his afflicted ſoul. Theſe principles alſo engage ſome people to renounce the world and its hopes, in order to devote themſelves entirely to the ſervice of the ſick, and to the exerciſe of thoſe melancholy and unpleaſing duties, in which they perſevere, with a degree of aſſiduity, that the

the hope of the moſt ſplendid reward could never excite. This indeed is diſintereſted and exemplary virtue!—unfeigned and truly admirable piety! What love and regard is then due to the ſublime ſentiment which can inſpire ſuch painful ſelf-denial. Every precept which is merely human, muſt neceſſarily be regulated by ideas of *right* and *juſtice*. It is peculiar to Chriſtianity to impoſe duties, of which the foundation is placed beyond the narrow circle of perſonal intereſt and worldly concerns. I know not how it is, but, amid the diverſity of opinions, one cannot help being deeply affected, by contemplating the final proſpect which the Goſpel preſents: It exhibits a view awfully ſublime, of that laſt, that eternal day, when every action, every thought, however ſecret, will be diſcloſed, in preſence of the whole univerſe, and when GOD Himſelf ſhall be our judge. And while we expect to hear a recital of all the various virtues and vices which have led men to celebrity, we find that the Divine Judge has choſen a ſingle quality, a virtue without ſplendour, as our claim to a happy immortality. He pronounces theſe few memorable words, which comprehend the whole compaſs of our duty: *I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; thirſty, and ye gave me drink; I was a priſoner, and ye viſited me. Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.*——Ah! how

pleaſing it is, to contemplate the triumphs of goodneſs,—to ſee it exalted under every poſſible form! We feel ſo many wants,—ſuch weakneſs, and ſuch a deficiency of our own powers, that *goodneſs*, the moſt ſublime and precious of virtues, ſeems to be our only ſafeguard, and, as it were, the myſterious band of all nature.

The ſpirit of charity, ſo eſſential in its ſtrict interpretation, is alſo applicable to thoſe marks of attention,—thoſe delicate expreſſions of regard, which are due to the different degrees of knowledge and abilities amongſt men. In this reſpect alſo, ſociety has its *rich* and *poor*: And a thorough knowledge of the ſecrets of our moral nature, would lead us to extend the ſpirit of charity, to a general benevolence, and an indulgent affability of manners, which protects others from feeling a painful ſenſe of inferiority, and teaches us to treat with tender regard, that wonderous veil, purpoſely placed by an inviſible and beneficent hand, between the light of truth, and ſuch imperfections as we are unable to correct.

Chriſtian morality always conſults the welfare of mankind in general. In order to place all men on an equal footing, the Goſpel takes cogniſance of their private ſentiments, condemning pride, and recommending humility. It tends to aboliſh thoſe diſtinctions of rank, that appear ſo important among men, when they only view the little points that mark the gradations in our ſcale of vanity.

Religion

Religion teaches us that haughtineſs and contempt only betray our ignorance and weakneſs: *What haſt thou, that thou didſt not receive? now, if thou didſt receive it, why doſt thou glory?* How quickly does the pride of man ſhrink to nothing before theſe awful words? By continually reminding us of the ſhortneſs of life, and thus guarding us from its prevalent illuſions, Religion ſeems alſo to conduct us to the ſame end. The enjoyments of this world, reſemble the buſtle that is made when the Monarch iſſues forth from his palace in his regal chariot,—the guards attend,—they haſten to line the way; but no ſooner the warlike inſtruments have begun to ſound, than the Prince, hurried on in his rapid courſe, (a true repreſentation of human life) hears no more of theſe loud and empty honours.

The greater part of the moral inſtructions of antiquity, were addreſſed to man, conſidered either as an individual, ſolicitous about his own deſtiny, or as a citizen, bound to virtue by the duties he owed to his country; but neither of theſe modes of inſtruction was ſufficiently extenſive. When we counſel the ſolitary individual, no more is neceſſary than to endeavour to free him from thoſe turbulent paſſions which endanger his happineſs and repoſe; and every obligation impoſed on the members of a political ſtate, muſt participate of a ſpirit of jealouſy, which, at the command of the Prince, may be converted into

hatred. The Chriſtian Religion, more enlarged in its views, overlooks thoſe diſtinctions among men that ariſe from their being ſubjected to different governments. Chriſtianity views all mankind as citizens of the ſame great ſociety,—as members of one family, having the ſame origin, the ſame dependent nature, and the ſame deſire of happineſs. The morality of the Goſpel, while it enjoins the reciprocal duties of benevolence, makes no diſtinction between *the inhabitant of Jeruſalem and of Samaria:* It conſiders men in their moſt univerſal and nobleſt relation, that of their intercourſe with the Supreme Being. And, in this point of view, all the hoſtile diviſions of kingdom againſt kingdom, and city againſt city, abſolutely diſappear. The whole human race have an equal right to the protection and beneficence of the Author of Nature; and we may include every intelligent being in the idea we form of the alliance which unites Heaven to Earth.

The rich and the powerful having framed the firſt laws, or at leaſt directed their ſpirit, their chief object in extolling juſtice, was to protect their poſſeſſions and privileges. The Legiſlator of our Religion, when ſpeaking of this virtue, ſhows that he had at heart the intereſt of the whole human race. We might even ſay, that he converted an ancient obligation into a new duty, by the manner in which he preſcribed it: *Whatſoever ye would*

would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them, is a precept truly remarkable, when we conſider its vaſt extent. There are ſo many inſtances of cruelty and oppreſſion, which elude the cenſure of the law, or the ſuperintendence of public opinion, that we cannot too highly value this ſimple, this important maxim of Chriſtian morality, which may ſerve as a guide and a meaſure to all our actions.

Religion alſo, in order to fix our determination, ſtrengthens the authority of conſcience. Every man has, within his own breaſt, a ſevere and quick-ſighted judge, whoſe laws are ſufficient to inſtruct him in his duty; for our moſt ſecret thoughts are tried by this judge, and at this tribunal, neither error nor diſguiſe can poſſibly find acceſs.

The caſe is very different, when we inflict cenſures on others. Their *actions* alone can fall under our obſervation, and the motives from which they ſpring,—the emotions and conflicts which accompany them,—the regrets and repentance that follow them, though all eſſential characters, equally eſcape our penetration. Thus Religion, ever wiſe and beneficent in its counſels, cautions us againſt forming violent and precipitate judgments. One cannot read without emotion, that leſſon of forbearance, ſo mildly addreſſed to the crowd that ſurrounded the woman taken in adultery, *He that is without ſin among you,*

let him firſt caſt a ſtone at her. And how are we ſtruck with admiration, when we ſee Religion ſo anxiouſly employed about the fate of thoſe, whom ſuſpicions or falſe accuſations have dragged before the tribunals of men! 'It is better,' ſays Religion, 'that a hundred culprits ſhould e-'ſcape puniſhment, than that one innocent per-'ſon ſhould be condemned to ſuffer.' How well does this tender ſolicitude correſpond with the fineſt feelings of the heart! Innocence abandoned to infamy, and ſurrounded with all the horrors of a ſhameful death, is the moſt dreadful ſpectacle that imagination can repreſent. We are ſo ſhocked by it, that we are ready to think, that in the ſight of God, the whole human race is reſponſible for ſuch a crime. Yes, under Thy protection, O my God, injured virtue and violated innocence, find a ſure refuge; nor is it in vain that they look towards Thee for comfort when purſued by men, and truſt with confidence to that laſt, that awful day, when Thy juſtice will overtake their cruel perſecutors.

I intend briefly to notice only a few of the peculiar characters of the Chriſtian Religion: It is an idea perfectly new, to eſtimate the merit of our actions, neither by their greatneſs nor importance, but to value them merely as they are proportioned to our means and abilities. This ſyſtem, which preſents the ſame motive, the ſame hope of reward to the endeavours of the weak

as

as to the exertions of the ſtrong,—to the *widow's mite*, as to the moſt liberal donations of the opulent,—this ſyſtem, ſo wiſe and ſo equitable, ſeems to animate our whole moral nature, and announce to us, that the vaſt circle of good actions, and ſocial virtues, may be ſubjected to rules ſimilar to thoſe which govern the immenſe domain of phyſical nature, where the ſimpleſt plant or flower contributes, in ſome degree, to the perfection of the Creator's grand deſign, and compoſes one part of the harmonious univerſe.

The influence of Chriſtian morality, however, extends ſtill farther: For actuated by a ſpirit abſolutely peculiar to itſelf, it ſets a value on our intentions,—on ſuch ſecret and internal determinations, as perhaps, by the intervention of various obſtacles, may never be carried into execution. Chriſtianity directs, as it were, our firſt thoughts, our ſecret inclinations: It reminds us, that we are continually in the preſence of God: It cautions us to repreſs the ſuggeſtions of evil before they gain ground: In ſhort it habituates us to the early practice of virtue, by ſtrongly impreſſing on our minds, during our tender years, a conſtant ſenſe of *good* and *evil*, of *right* and *wrong*; and thus cultivating in our hearts the love of integrity and order, before we are called on to practiſe theſe virtues amid the active ſcenes of life.

But,

But, while we are offered ſo many opportunities of meriting divine approbation, it is alſo neceſſary to guard us from ſinking into deſpondency, through a continual ſenſe of our errors and weakneſs,—and that in thoſe moments, when we, as it were, loſe our hold of that chain which connects us to the Supreme Being, ſome hope ſhould ſtill remain of regaining it. To aſſiſt our weakneſs, then, the Goſpel offers to us the new, the excellent doctrine of Repentance, and the promiſes which are annexed to it. This noble doctrine, abſolutely peculiar to the Chriſtian Religion, prevents our relation with the Deity from being broke off as ſoon as it is perceived. The culprit may ſtill hope for the favour of God; and, after contrition, he may thus find relief to his diſquieted conſcience. Human nature, that wondrous conſtitution, that mixture of ſpirit with matter,—ſtrength with weakneſs,—reaſon with imagination,—certainty with doubt,—and will with heſitation, neceſſarily requires a legiſlation accommodated to ſuch extraordinary circumſtances. Man, in his moſt improved ſtate, reſembles an infant who attempts to walk, and falls, and riſes, and falls again. Soon would he be loſt to morality, were he, on committing his firſt fault, to forfeit every hope of repairing it. In this point of view, the idea of repentance is one of the moſt philoſophical which the Goſpel contains.

The

The precept which earneſtly commands us to do good in ſecret, and without oſtentation, is alſo the happy reſult of profound wiſdom. The Legiſlator of our Religion, undoubtedly perceived, that the praiſe of man was a foundation too unſtable for the ſupport of morality, and that vanity, when enjoying ſuch triumphs, was too unſteady to ſerve as a faithful guide: But the moſt important truth, announced by this leſſon of doing good in ſecret, is that morality would be very much circumſcribed, were men only to ſtudy integrity in ſuch actions as others might witneſs. There are but very few opportunities of doing good in public; but a man's whole life may be occupied by the practice of unſeen virtues. In ſhort, from that conſtant regard which Religion maintains for the dictates of conſcience, the happieſt conſequences reſult. For it is evident that, when we have in our own heart a juſt and enlightened judge, that very judge becomes our friend and our comforter, when we are unjuſtly condemned, or when events do not correſpond to the purity of our intentions. We then ſeem to have, as it were, two parties within us, the one aiding and ſuſtaining the other on every occaſion in which virtue unites them.

The ſevere cenſure which the Goſpel every where inflicts on ſuperſtition, proceeds from a rational and enlightened principle. Men are ever too apt to confine their expreſſions of veneration

neration for the Deity, merely to certain exterior forms; becauſe it is always eaſier to practiſe theſe, than to combat and ſubdue the paſſions. The human mind ſeizes with avidity, every extraordinary idea; and when theſe are, in part, of our own creation, they gratify our ſelf-love and captivate our imagination. Man, when advanced to maturity, is not terrified by thoſe phantoms which are ſo formidable in his infancy; but myſteries, occult cauſes, and extraordinary appearances, continue to make an impreſſion on his mind. The wonders of nature being too immenſe for his narrow capacity, he allows himſelf to be led on by ideas more proportioned to his ſtrength,—by mere ſuperſtition. We delight in trivial ceremonies, obſervances and ſcruples, becauſe we ourſelves are little, and becauſe we would wiſh, notwithſtanding our weakneſs, to know the ultimate extent of our obligations. Some perſons, agitated by vain fears, or impelled by miſtaken notions of religious duties, have recourſe to ſuperſtition as a ready protection from the various diſtractions and anxieties of their minds. The doctrines of the Goſpel tend to repreſs every diſpoſition of this ſort: For, on the one hand, they facilitate the practice of morality, by reducing the whole ſyſtem of our duties to ſimple principles; and, on the other hand, they ſeem to offer us an eaſy acceſs to the Supreme Being,—by teaching us to approach him with

with the effuſions of a pure and grateful ſoul,—by informing us that it is neither on Mount *Zion* nor Mount *Gerizzim*, that we are to raiſe an altar, but that every man's heart may become a temple, where he may adore the Eternal *in ſpirit and in truth*. The Chriſtian Religion is the only one which, diſcarding ceremonies and ſuperſtition, retains us within the bounds of nature. It alone points out to us that a high degree of reſpect is due to the dictates of *conſcience*,—that benevolence is the worſhip moſt acceptable to the Ruler of the univerſe,—and that our moral conduct is our beſt ground of future hope. The doctrines of the Goſpel are founded on principles of ſound philoſophy; and all that men have added, is only a vain pageantry, and a more ſounding tone.

Let us alſo join in grateful homage to Chriſtianity, for having formed that ſacred tie which unites the human pair, not in a temporary and caſual manner, but for the whole courſe of their lives,—that union which affords ſupport to the weaker ſex, and domeſtic comfort to the other,—that pure alliance, which reſtrains men from ſacrificing the unity and peace and happineſs of families to mere capricious deſires,—and which, by giving children an early example of the bleſſings that attend fidelity and duty, implants in their tender minds the ſeeds of every virtue. Religion alone has diſcovered, that amidſt a world where ſelfiſhneſs ſo much prevails, our friend-

friendſhips require to be fortified by that ſtrict union of intereſt and honour, of which marriage alone is the ſource. Hail ſacred alliance! happy band! which endears all the enjoyments of life, and, by multiplying our objects of hope, ſheds around us, ſo to ſpeak, freſh rays of the divine beneficence, and ſtrengthens every good, every pious thought: This benign tie ſeems to gain ſtrength by time; becauſe all our ſentiments of duty acquire a kind of ſanctity, by the pleaſing remembrance of a long and happy union; and, in declining age, when the friendſhips of the world forſake us, this gentle alliance affords us encouragement and conſolation. In ſhort, Religion has wiſely decreed, That nothing leſs than this venerable and laſting attachment, this generous and faithful friendſhip, ſhould be permitted to have a lawful aſcendency over untainted innocence, and unſullied virtue, the brighteſt ornaments of the female ſex. Theſe principles are not, indeed, accommodated to the corruptions of the human heart: But the ſervice that Religion propoſes to render,—is to aſſiſt us in checking and correcting our irregular appetites,—to teach us to ſhun the ſnares and allurements of vice,—to maintain amongſt us thoſe noble principles, which are the foundation of public order,—and to diffuſe around a ſalutary light, which may guide our ſteps in the right path of wiſdom and happineſs.

Religion

Religion continually recommends thoſe univerſal duties, which are known by the name of *private good morals*,—duties which ſome have pretended to conſider as unconnected with the public intereſt, though they are evidently united to it by ſo many different ties. Although every private act of wiſdom and virtue, may not be of immediate importance to ſociety; yet as morality muſt be cheriſhed and reared up with care, like thoſe delicate plants whoſe cultivation requires continual attention to preſerve their beauty, no ſooner would diſtinctions be introduced between *perſonal* and *public* morality, ſo as to afford a pretext for departing from our duty, when convenience required it, than all the charms of virtue would vaniſh, and its practice become every day more burdenſome.

I am of opinion, that there exiſts a certain relation, more or leſs evident, amongſt all things good and eſtimable. The idea of this beautiful alliance has in it, methinks, ſomething ſo exquiſitely pleaſing, as to ſatisfy, we know not how, our moſt flattering wiſhes and our moſt exalted hopes. In order to illuſtrate this important truth, were I permitted to interrogate the Young Man whoſe virtues and talents are the moſt remarkable in Europe, I would aſk him, if he had not experienced, that his filial tenderneſs, the regularity of his domeſtic life, the purity of his thoughts, and all his exemplary private qualities,

are

are united, by a peculiar tie, to thoſe noble ſentiments which make him appear with ſo much ſplendour as a ſtateſman. But without looking ſo high, for an inſtance, who has not been often ſtruck with admiration, at the noble candour and ſimplicity of manners, to be found in many worthy private citizens? Thus we clearly diſcover, that there may exiſt a certain dignity, and I may ſay grandeur, of character, independent of mere politeneſs in manners and diſcourſe, or of that empty elevation which proceeds from birth, rank and fortune.

Although I only intend to glance at the principal advantages which we reap from the Chriſtian Religion, I cannot omit noticing one conſolatory doctrine which we owe to it alone: The felicity reſerved for infant innocence,—precious and comfortable thought, to ſolace thoſe tender, thoſe afflicted mothers, who behold the objects of their affection ſnatched from their boſom, at a period when they are incapable of any merit, and when every hope muſt abſolutely reſt on the infinite goodneſs of the Supreme Being! I feel myſelf alſo irreſiſtibly led to mix with the eulogiums due to Chriſtian morality, a warm ſentiment of gratitude, for thoſe mild and paternal precepts, which are blended with all its doctrines; indeed, the peculiar character of its inſtructions, is to captivate our imagination, and to encourage our beſt, our moſt natural inclinations.

Senſi-

Senſibility, happineſs and hope, are the firmeſt tie of a heart yet untainted with vice; and every emotion which elevates the mind to the idea of a God, dignifies, in our eyes, the inſtructions of morality, by conſtantly recalling our attention to the ſublime perfection of their Divine Author.

In ſhort, we cannot but admire that ſpirit of moderation which forms ſo ſtriking a feature in the morality of the Goſpel. We do not, indeed, find the ſame temperate ſpirit in the interpreters of the Chriſtian doctrines. Not a few of them, hurried on by a falſe zeal, and rather diſpoſed to ſpeak in the name of a threatening maſter, than in that of a God full of mercy and peace, have exaggerated and multiplied the duties of men; and, in order to ſupport their ſyſtem, have often obſcured the natural ſenſe, and general import, of the precepts contained in the Scriptures: Sometimes, alſo, laying hold of a few detached words, they have conſtructed a new ſyſtem of divinity, widely different, in many reſpects, from the intentions of the Apoſtles themſelves. Servants always go farther than their maſters: As the firſt thought does not belong to them, they are only occupied in making additions to it. Beſides, a true ſpirit of moderation conſiſts in a kind of proportion, which muſt ever be, in a great meaſure, unknown to mere imitators. Some reſolution is neceſſary to ſet proper limits

even to virtue itſelf; and to determine the preciſe and exact meaſure of the numerous duties of men, requires the moſt profound and ſublime intelligence. By ſuch intelligence, did the Inſtitutor of univerſal morality ſhew himſelf ſuperior to thoſe ages of ignorance, when men are continually ruſhing into extremes,—when they miſtake ſuperſtition for piety, oppreſſion for juſtice, and weakneſs for mercy; and when, by the exaggeration of every ſentiment, they ſeek a kind of merit entirely incompatible with the immutable laws of wiſdom. By the ſame intelligence, did that great Legiſlator riſe above tranſitory opinions, to enjoin precepts adapted to all times and all ages, and to teach doctrines, not accommodated to the momentary humour of a people, but to the real nature of man.

We may eaſily diſcover other characters in Chriſtian morality, which diſtinguiſh it from the leſſons of philoſophy; but in examining this ſerious and important ſubject, I have purpoſely avoided mentioning any thing which can at all be conſidered as imaginary. Great features are moſt properly employed in deſcribing grand things; and any other manner would not be ſuitable to the reſpect due to this ſubject. I muſt ſay, however, that when I have contemplated attentively the various parts of Chriſtian morality, I have found, that independent of general ideas and particular precepts, which continually excite

excite deep admiration, there reigns, throughout theſe ſublime doctrines, a ſpirit of benevolence and truth and wiſdom, whoſe character we can perceive only by our internal feeling,—that faculty of the ſoul, which does not ſtop to diſtinguiſh objects, but penetrates, by a ſort of inſtinct, to that original Goodneſs, that ineffable model, from which every generous intention, and every great thought has taken its firſt form.

CHAP. XVIII.

Conclusion.

WHAT a time, what a place, have I chosen, to entertain people with discourses of Morality and Religion! Even to conceive of such an undertaking, is a trial of courage. Every one is busily occupied with his harvest, —all his thoughts are employed about his affairs, and so much absorbed in the present moment, that every thing beyond it appears chimerical. When I was formerly engrossed by cares for the public welfare, and writing on my favourite topic, I could gain the attention of men by a train of reflections, in which their own fortune, and the political power of their country, were deeply interested: It was in the name of their most ardent desires that I engaged them to listen to me. But, in treating the subject of which I have now made choice, I must address myself to their original nature,—to those primary dispositions which are, in a great measure,

ſure, effaced. Thus I muſt endeavour to revive the ſentiments which I wiſh to direct, and to call forth a concern for the important matters which I deſire to illuſtrate. When I conſider the ordinary modes of thinking amongſt men, I have great reaſon to fear, that I ſhall too often have for my judges, either ſuch perſons as are totally indifferent, or ſuch as are too ſevere in their cenſures. But all the machinations of vanity appear trivial, when compared with the motives by which I have been actuated; and if any of my reflections ſhall be found congenial with the ſentiments of a feeling mind, and contribute, in the ſmalleſt degree, towards its happineſs, I ſhall enjoy the beſt, the ſweeteſt reward. Such was my wiſh, when I undertook to form, according to my ſmall abilities, ſome reflections on the Importance of Religious Opinions.

Alas! the more we know of the world, its phantoms and vain deceits, the more we feel the need of ſome great principle, that may elevate our ſouls above every diſcouraging event. Are we in purſuit of glory, honours, or the favour of others?—every where do we find illuſions and miſtakes; and it is our lot often to experience thoſe croſſes and diſappointments which proceed from the paſſions or the weakneſs of men. If we leave our veſſel in the harbour, we are dazzled by the ſucceſs of others,—if we launch

forth into the deep, we are overtaken by the tempeſts, and become the ſport of the winds. Activity, inaction, ardour and indifference, are all attended with peculiar cares and difficulties. No one is ſecure from the caprices of fortune; and even when we have attained our higheſt wiſhes, the very ſummit of our ambition, we no ſooner become habituated to the wiſhed-for enjoyment, than languor and apathy diſſipate its charm. Our enjoyments can endure but for an inſtant; and we may ſay, that there is nothing perpetual but *change*. What need, then, have we to lay hold of thoſe immutable principles, which are not the work of man,—which derive not their value from tranſitory opinions,—which are applicable in every caſe, and are equally neceſſary at the moment of triumph, as in the hour of defeat,—in proſperity as well as adverſity, and become, as occaſion requires, our conſolation, our encouragement and our guide? How eſtimable, how efficacious would they appear, were we duly to conſider them as the beſt ſupport of order and morality? Every one would concur, to the utmoſt of his power, in ſupporting them, with the ſame degree of anxiety that becomes the citizens of a nation in ſecuring the political intereſt of the ſtate. Then would a new ſcene open to our view: Men of genius and ſcience, far from following the counſels of vanity, or endeavouring to aboliſh the moſt

beneficial opinions, would exert all the powers of eloquence in their defence. The penetrating metaphyſician would be eager to add to the common treaſure of our hopes, every new diſcovery, and all the light which he gains from his indefatigable labours, and the perſpicacity of his mind. The attentive ſtudent of nature, animated by the ſame ſentiment, amid his inveſtigations, would ſeize with avidity, every thing that can contribute to ſupport the firſt principles of Religion, and the foundation of our ſublimeſt hopes. The profound moraliſt, the philoſophic legiſlator, would concur in the ſame deſign; and even ſuch perſons as are merely endowed with a lively imagination, would, in their eccentric flights, reſemble thoſe wandering travellers who, on their return from their random excurſions, ſometimes bring home to their country ſome new and valuable diſcoveries. In every part of *moral* as well as *phyſical* nature, there are paths which lead to the diſcovery of unknown ſecrets; and the harveſt that may be gathered in the vaſt empire of nature, is as extenſive as diverſified. How delightful would be ſuch general unanimity, in promoting this noble purpoſe! Amid ſuch a happy confederacy, I have ſometimes repreſented in imagination, a ſociety of reſpectable perſons, diſtinguiſhed by their learning and genius, appointed to receive and arrange all new ideas that

may, at any time, be ſuggeſted, proper to confirm us in our moſt precious opinions. Thoughts of this kind ſometimes occur to the ſolitary thinker; but they are frequently loſt to the public, becauſe he happens not to poſſeſs ſufficient talents, to connect and arrange them ſyſtematically; and though ſuch thoughts were of a nature merely relative, and only added, ſo to ſpeak, one grain of ſand to ſtrengthen the banks raiſed on our ſhore, ſtill each generation would tranſmit to the ſucceeding one, a richer heritage. We ſometimes pompouſly enrol a new word introduced into our language, and the greateſt geniuſes of the age are called to witneſs the ceremony. Shall it not be eſteemed as honourable an enterpriſe, to examine, to chooſe, and to adopt ſuch ideas and obſervations, as may ſerve to enlighten us in the moſt important of all our inquiries? One new thought, one new diſcovery of this kind, better merits a laurel, than the richeſt productions of eloquence and literature. Let us, for a moment, ſuppoſe, that in the moſt ancient nation of the world, the magi had preſerved, from time immemorial, every new argument, every original idea, that had been advanced in ſupport of our belief of the exiſtence of a God, and the immortality of the ſoul; and that they had, from time to time, progreſſively as diſcoveries were made, inſcribed theſe in a religious code, entitled the Book of Happineſs and

Hope,

Hope, how much would we eſteem ſuch a treaſure! With what reverence would we approach the ancient temple in which thoſe ſuperb archives were depoſited! On the contrary, were we to figure a ſequeſtrated retreat, where all the ſubtile arguments have been collected and preſerved, by which men have endeavoured to overthrow or weaken thoſe ſacred opinions that unite the univerſe to a Sublime Intelligence, and the deſtiny of man to Infinite Goodneſs, Who amongſt us would wiſh to enter that dreary abode? Who would be deſirous to explore thoſe fatal regiſters? Alas! let us learn better to know our own nature, and let not the delirium of our paſſions conceal from us its wants. We need a God, ſuch as Religion preſents, wiſe, omnipotent, and merciful,—the firſt ſource of all good, and the kind diſpenſer of happineſs to mankind. Let us open our hearts, and every faculty of our ſouls, to receive that brilliant light, and let us delight in diffuſing it around us. Let us, in our youth, be deeply impreſſed with thoſe ſentiments, which are equally neceſſary at every period of life,—let us cheriſh them in our more vigorous age, and, confirmed by mature reflection, let them become our conſolation in the decline of life. Without this thought, what avail all the enchanting beauties of nature? What avail the majeſtic powers of the human mind, and all its wondrous conceptions, if ſeparated from its noble origin?

origin? How hapleſs would be the condition of thoſe affectionate ſouls, that are endowed with tender ſenſibility, were they deprived of the only foundation of their hope? Forgive me, O Divine Ruler of the world! if, forgetting my own weakneſs, and yielding to the ardent impulſe of my heart, I have preſumed to ſpeak to men of Thy Exiſtence, Thy Infinity and Thy Goodneſs! Forgive me, if, though lately toſt amid the tumultuous waves of paſſion, I dare to raiſe my thoughts to the realms of Eternal Peace, where Thou dwelleſt, ſurrounded with Thy glory and omnipotence! Ah! I now ſee more and more, how much we ought to love Thee and confide in Thee! Men capriciouſly exalt or depreſs their favourites; and when they have availed themſelves of the talents devoted to their ſervice, they too often forſake their victim, or cruſh him like a reed. There is in the univerſe but one immutable ſource of juſtice and perfect goodneſs,—one conſolatory thought to ſolace us in every ſituation; yet we conſtantly wander from that happy idea, in our vain purſuit of felicity. There are certain illuſions, which ſeem to faſcinate the greater part of mankind, and make them forgetful of every rational, every religious and natural ſentiment, which may elevate their thoughts to the Supreme Being. Blind worldly paſſions, and the anxious purſuit of honour and fortune, only ſerve to harden the heart.

Every

Every thing about them is dangerous, ſelfiſh and inſipid; they can only lead to a vain name, and empty pomp. Let the emulous, the ambitious, thus view the objects of their purſuit. Though the heavens ſhould be obſcured, and the earth become darkened,—though futurity ſhould be loſt to your view, would ye be ſatisfied with a faint glimmering light, that only permits you to diſcern the fawning homage of your dependents? But how ſhall theſe ſervilities, in which you delight ſo much, be rendered permanent? What means ſhall you employ to retain that humble adulation which is beſtowed on you by others, and for which there are ſo many competitors? How much happier are thoſe perſons who are actuated by a ſentiment of rational piety, that enlightens their principles, moderates their paſſions, and bends them, ſo to ſpeak, to the lot of man! Piety, of this ſort, may be conſidered as our conſtant guardian, our kind and faithful friend;—who, with pleaſure, allows us the enjoyment of all the bleſſings of life, and contributes to our happineſs, by reminding us of the gratitude that is due to our moſt bountiful Benefactor;—who permits us freely to uſe our talents and faculties, but, at the ſame time, teaches us to keep virtue and morality in view, that we may not deviate from the right path, nor have cauſe of regret;—who prevents us not from purſuing glory and ambition, but, by ſtill reminding

us of their fleeting and inconſtant nature, preſerves us from a fatal intoxication;—who is ever preſent with us, not to diſturb our enjoyments, or impoſe unneceſſary reſtraints, but to temper all our thoughts and actions with the mild ſpirit of wiſdom and moderation. In ſhort, amidſt adverſity, and in declining age, when our boaſted ſtrength fails us, piety becomes our moſt effectual comforter. It calms the remorſe we feel for paſt errors, by pointing out an over-ruling Providence,—and quiets our fears, by preſenting hopes more worthy of our attention than all worldly concerns. Theſe reflections proceed not from any ſentiments of melancholy, which my preſent ſituation impreſſes on my mind. I ſhould have feared this, were I not conſcious that I always was of the ſame opinion, and that the various circumſtances of a life frequently perturbated, had ſhown me the neceſſity of repoſing on ſome principle independent of men and caſual events. In my preſent lonely condition, driven into ſolitude by an unforeſeen accident *, I experience, it is true, more than ever, the need of thoſe rational ſentiments, thoſe great and ſublime truths, which I have always loved, and which I have here recommended to men, at a moment when they ſeem, alas! too much inclined to neglect them. How much are they miſtaken in their calculations! They truſt to-day

* I had begun this chapter during my exile.

day in their own ſtrength, but to-morrow they will feel their weakneſs: By turning their thoughts from the termination of life, they hope to remove the fatal boundary; but already the ſignal is given, and even now they hear the knell of their laſt hour. Ah! how can we raſhly ſacrifice thoſe comfortable truths which preſent us with a future proſpect beyond this world and all its concerns! Should we not rather ſeek after them with diligent anxiety, and eagerly purſue their traces, were they ever, by any means, unfortunately effaced.

It may perhaps be ſaid, that all theſe ideas are vague, and ill adapted to the humour of the times. But when one is placed at a certain diſtance from the theatre of ambition and vanity, Can any thing appear more vague to him than the paſſions of others? Are men occupied in conſulting our intereſt or happineſs? No: they ſeek precedency, and eagerly repulſe their rivals; and though they now and then pronounce the name of *public good*, yet it is only, as it were, a watch-word which they have borrowed, in order to paſs through our ranks without ſuſpicion. Where ſhall we then find any real tie, or, ſo to ſpeak, any common rendezvous, but in thoſe immutable ideas, which are equally applicable to the whole human race,—which come to aſſiſt the human mind at that point where reaſon fails, and preſent, not indeed ſuch objects as may gratify

tify our tranſitory deſires, but things more eſtimable, ſuch as may intereſt our whole life, our exiſtence, our nature, and, above all, that ſublime ſpirit, which conſtitutes our true grandeur, but whoſe various relations, and whoſe ultimate degree of power, muſt ever remain, in a great meaſure, unknown to us.

FINIS.